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**Workshop III: Investigative Journalism Against Organised Crime in
SEE: Strengthening Methods and Means**

Organized by:

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**SUMMARY OF MAJOR DISCUSSION POINTS AND
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Major restraints for investigative journalism on organised crime in SEE

- In all countries of SEE there is freedom of the media, but the necessary legal frameworks, which can guarantee their independence, do not exist.
- There is no freedom of information law in Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM. All other SEE states have introduced the relevant legislation but there is no law enforcement.
- Access to public information and data is difficult and often impossible due to bureaucratic red tape.
- There is no availability of public information regarding individual wealth.
- There is a lack of serious, not related to crime, funding sources for independent media.
- Organised crime is expanding fast into media ownership threatening to take over completely the media in most SEE countries.
- The existence of close links between government/mafia/business compromise the independence of the media.
- There are deep state pressures against proper investigative reporting through state advertisements.
- Investigative journalists often become targets of physical abuse and violence.
- There is no serious professional training of journalists and of investigative journalists in particular, who seriously lack the necessary skills.

Conclusions

- The protection of media from financial control of organised crime is a major question which needs urgent answers.
- The real challenge for investigative journalism (in general and not only in SEE) is to expose the close connection between organised crime, political parties and government.
- The media in SEE have been successful in raising public awareness about organised crime but they have not managed to raise serious public interest, or provoke public debate about the real causes of crime, how it permeates political life, and its consequences.
- Investigative journalists reporting on organised crime in SEE treat it as a national issue and fail to expose its transnational dimensions.
- Reports on organised crime focus on its sensational side (often under pressure from the newspaper editor) and fail to look at the social/economic circumstances, which lead to it. It is useful to remember that there is an inflation of media outlets in all SEE countries, however, most of them exist as black-mailing agents of their owners who are involved in unrelated business.
- In the eyes of the public in all SEE countries the credibility of the media is low; there is no job satisfaction in investigative journalism on organised crime. Reports on crime do not contribute to professional advancement. The interest of the public in them is low and successful reports have no impact at a policy level. According to a poll in Serbia journalists are not pursuing investigative reporting because: there is no money for it (82%); it is useless (78%); it is dangerous (70%); the editorial policy does not support it (55%); it is time consuming (52.1 %); not interesting (16%).
- Addressing the question of violence against journalists should be a priority. Investigative journalists in SEE chose to report on topics which do not put them in danger.

- The level of investigative reporting in SEE has dropped dramatically when compared to that of ten years ago. In Romania, in particular, there has been no coverage of any serious criminal activities for some time while there has been pressure from the government not to report on organised crime so as not to damage the international image of the country.
- The level of co-operation between investigative journalists in the region is not what it should be although such co-operation is essential to cut down on investigative costs and to achieve better investigative results.
- It is imperative to network with investigative journalists at an international level.
- An international network of like-minded journalists can help investigative journalists in SEE find information which cannot be accessed in their countries, and have their investigative stories published elsewhere when turned down by their own papers.
- The EU has had a catalytic role in promoting democracy, transparency and the rule of law in SEE. However, its 2001 initiative against organised crime remained a dead letter.
- A lot of journalism training programmes financed by international donors, were only partly useful as they failed to take into consideration the political, economic and social realities in SEE.
- Very few reporters in SEE are professional, committed journalists.

Policy Recommendations

- There is an urgent need for an extensive information campaign to raise public awareness of, and particularly sensitivity regarding the serious economic/social consequences of organised crime and corruption for their countries and particularly of the impact that it has on their aspirations for accession to the EU. To this end the role of the media (but also of NGO's) is essential.
- Investigative journalists need to find ways of making their stories interesting to capture the public's imagination. To this end there should be a regional prize for the best investigative journalism report on organised crime.
- Investigative reports need to be followed up to attract public attention.
- Relations between business and the media need to be tightly regulated to ensure that there is no financial interaction between media and business related to illegal activities
- Legislation ensuring freedom of information and its implementation is imperative. To this effect a) the international community needs to put pressure on governments in SEE; b) a Freedom of Information Task Force in SEE should be established with the cooperation of journalists and NGO's with the prime aim to attract attention to the issue and monitor progress
- The media in cooperation with NGO's need to launch a major campaign asking for the change of the party financing system (on the basis of which mafia infiltrates politics), for a general reform of the legal system and the implementation of the rule of law.
- A committee for the Protection of Journalists should be established within SECI.
- The Media Charter to which governments in SEE agreed to in 1999 has not been properly used. Governments in SEE need to endow it with the necessary power.
- The EU needs to include a special clause in the accession requirements to make governments in SEE more responsible in the fight against organised crime.

- Investigative journalists in SEE need to bring specific cases of organised crime involving European countries to the attention of the governments of these countries in order to raise their active interest.
- Investigative journalists on organised crime need to shed light to the transnational dimension of criminal activities.
- There is an urgent need for a school of journalism in SEE to raise the standards of journalism in all SEE countries; also and for training seminars on investigative journalism which have to be in tune with the special circumstances of the region. Editors should also be trained.
- Investigative journalists can get around the lack of local information of criminals who operate internationally by accessing international sources (i.e. FBI data). The internet can be an extremely useful tool in this regard.
- The best way for journalists in SEE to network internationally is for instance to set up themselves as agents of western media in the region.
- There should be a systematic effort to build a regional network of investigative journalists with the aim to share information, have joint investigations and reports, build a database and a regional resources centre, lobby locally and internationally to promote the interests of their profession and to attract funding.
- Investigative journalists who find it difficult to publish their stories in their countries for security reasons should publish their stories via the Internet; a lot of these stories then are published in western newspapers.
- Investigative journalists in SEE have to actively look for solutions of the problems they are faced with in order to attract the attention of international organisations and of international donors.