



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
MISSION IN KOSOVO

**Remarks of Ambassador Werner Wnendt,
Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo,**

***State of Kosovo's Print Media
Financial, Educational and Economic Impediments***

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The following are opening remarks given at a conference organized by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the Press Council of Kosovo.

Media have played an important role in building the democratic foundations of civil society. Thomas Jefferson, who at the time when America, one of the world's first democracies, was being born stated: *"Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."*

The history of print media is an often-dramatic chapter of the human experience going back some five centuries. In Renaissance Europe handwritten newsletters circulated privately among merchants, passing along information about everything from wars and economic conditions to social customs and "human interest" features. The first printed daily newspaper appeared in 1650, in Leipzig. Very soon other titles followed in London, Paris, Vienna, Washington, Boston, Moscow and other cities of that time.

The industrial revolution, as it transformed all aspects life and society, had an overwhelming effect on the print media. From weak, small and elitist periodicals the print media turned into one of the most powerful tools of information and politics. They started to shape the reality of our times, influencing our minds and our opinions.

The power of the written word, the magic of photography and vibrant emotions of correspondents' sketches came together, composed into a printed masterpiece. With time, accurate and timely news reporting transformed journalism into a dynamic, hard-hitting force in the life of each society.

Reportage and journalism became the key instigators in initiating public debate and promoting informed participation in public life, influencing the political decision making process.

Print media and democracy are interlinked, as one cannot exist without the other. Freedom of expression, freedom of judgment and the seducing challenge of public dispute came to its full power and beauty with the emergence of print media.

The fight for these values is ongoing one as we can see in many parts of the world where there are not guaranteed.

While radio and television and more recently the Internet have gradually supplanted newspapers in our time as primary information sources, print media still perseveres with its potential as one of the most powerful channels of public communication and as an artistic means of journalists' expression.

Media, print media included, have been often misused as instruments of propaganda and to spread hatred as it was the case in the most recent history of Kosovo and western Balkans. However that has changed a lot since then.

Kosovo is now a society going through a wide-ranging transition – political, social and economic. It has been given a chance to raise up and build the foundation of modern democracy, with the assistance of the International Community.

In Kosovo OSCE was tasked with institution building. We thought one of the best ways to help the people of Kosovo to shape their own future, was to invest in development of media – both print and broadcast. We have been actively assisting, advising, monitoring and providing guidance. And our efforts have brought visible results: The rather quick and very successful establishment of the self-regulatory Press Council has been a real achievement. Moreover, all but one paper in Kosovo have committed to the Press Code of Conduct and today together form the Press Council.

Already during its short existence of merely one year, the Press Council has proven to have had a professionalising effect on the press. Hate speech seems to be a feature of the past, and where it does occur it is widely condemned by the print media themselves. Complaints first adjudicated by the Press Council have begun to be a mitigating factor if the case is later brought to court.

I would also like to underline that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Miklos Haraszti, during his last visit to Kosovo, praised the Kosovo Press Council for being directly linked to the recently adopted, and hopefully soon promulgated, Civil Defamation Law.

As the Press Council becomes more active in its role, print media gain more responsibility as well as more credibility in the eyes of the public.

And so I offer my congratulations to the members of the Press Council here today.

From my own observations, I can state that journalists in Kosovo have made great strides. Their dedicated work, responsible and courageous reporting, their efforts to look at the public institutions with critical eyes are vital when it comes to tackling maladies, such as corruption and human rights violations. Indeed, when it comes to public institutions – also on a local level - it is often only the print media playing the role of watchdogs, calling for accountability and transparency of the government and public administration.

Print media in Kosovo still face many challenges. They are only at the outset of their journey towards becoming a key factor in engineering Kosovo's political, social and economic framework. However there is room for improvement and I strongly believe that we are on the right track. This conference, held for the first time in this form and applying a more holistic approach to the challenges that the print media are facing in Kosovo, is an important step towards strengthening the print media.