

TRANSCRIPT

"EROSION OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN THE BALKANS: SHADOWS OF THE NINETIES"

A Conversation With Milka Tadic Mijovic

Moderator: Beka Vuco

ANNOUNCER:

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BEKA VUCO:

My name is Beka Vuco. I'm the director of the National Foundations in the Balkans. And-- we do this quite often-- almost every day, we have a different brown bag lunch at OSF, with different issues, with different subjects, with different topics, with different geographic areas that we cover-- around the world. But we don't do it a lot concerning the Balkans. On one hand, that's good, meaning that the Balkans are not the front-page news anymore as we were in the '90s.

But on the other hand-- it's not because we don't feel that people, not only within the OSF, but-- in general, have really the knowledge of what is happening in that part of the world. So this is an excellent opportunity to brush up on our knowledge on the Balkans (NOISE) on the present situation.

And-- it is great that Milka-- Milka Tadic Mijovic, is presently in New York. And we're using this opportunity to welcome Milka-- to the Open Society Foundations to give us an overview of the situation in the media. As you probably read in the short bio that-- we have prepared-- it is-- Milka has been a journalist for a very long time, one of the-- fighters for the free independent media, not only in Montenegro, her country of origin, but all over the Balkans. And in the last-- decade or s-- or so, we are faced with the-- as we with the title says, with the erosion of media freedom in the Balkans.

So we-- we have asked Milka to address that issue. Why is that happening? Why-- why the fr-- free and independent media, whatever that means actually, is having a very hard time in that part of the world. And not only in that part of the world, but today we're going to focus on the Balkans, obviously focus on Montenegro when-- where Milka is from.

But also kind of widen the scope toward the-- some of the other countries in the Balkans. Let me just point out that-- since 1991, 1992, maybe (?) since almost the beginning of the wars in the Balkans, the Open Society Foundations had been present in that part of the world, either through a number of the national foundations, local national foundations in today-- the countries that followed after the fall of Yugoslavia, as well as through our media program, which today is based in London. And it's called actually an independent journalist program.

We have been funding heavily. And when I say heavily, I mean heavily. Different media outlets throughout the Balkans. Whether it was-- radio stations during the siege in Sarajevo, whether it was the first outlets of the independent media in Kosovo, whether it was the-- ethnic media, whether it was Turkish or-- Serbian radio stations in Kosovo, Albanian radio stations in-- Macedonia or Roma, radio stations all over the Balkans, including some of the major dailies, weeklies, television stations.

And so on and so on. Agencies. Like a Beta (PH) agency or some other agency that emerged as a need, as-- as-- as a must during those hard times of Milosevic and Tudjman and-- and obviously the wars. Today if we look at the map-- where the independent media exists and the media that we have funded, I'm saying "we" Open Society Foundations. But there have been many, many other donors. We're just one of them.

We can hardly recognize and we can hardly see any of those media outlets that we have been funded. They disappeared. They changed their face. They have a different, now, look. They have sold themselves. They have merged. The governments have seized them and so many other issues. So-- that's why today's discussion that Milka will lead will give you maybe an insight: Why is it happening? How is it happening? And what are the dangers for the future, not only of-- of media, but the future of the countries in the Balkans. Milka.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Beka, thank you very much. And thank you all for coming. This is a great opportunity to talk-- in New York about (MIC NOISE) situation-- in the media and it is really great to talk-- in this foundation which supported, as Beka said, many of the free media during the worst era of Milosevic and-- and Tudjman and divorce (?) in the Balkans.

As you can see from the title, we are not-- we are talking about-- erosion of media freedom in the Balkans and-- I, as well, titled my presentation, "Shadows of the Nineties." But-- are those just-- shadows? Or we are living in the '90s or when we are

talking about the free media, maybe we have a worse situation than in the (COUGH)-
- horrible times of-- of-- of the '90s.

Watch-- what we actually had during the '90s, you all or most of you-- are there th--
to we had war nationalism, war crimes, dictatorships in-- some of our countries
there's isolation. But on the other hand, in such environment, we had such a strong
civil society resistance, focused opposition, anti-war opposition. Very strong
independent media, established with the support-- from donors, but as well from the--
- forces, from the Balkans, of-- from free journalists. So we had-- independent media
in all form of Yugoslav countries and actually those media where the if I can say a
foundation for the-- anti-war and-- anti-nationalistic-- movement in the Balkans.

What do we have now? Today we have completely different situation. We have all
Balkan states, which are actually-- some of them are members of E.U. Some of them
are on the track to become E.U. members. Governments-- formally-- trying-- saying
that they are for E.U. values. They are-- ref-- for reforms (THROAT CLEAR) multi-
culture so-- society, open to the western and all or most of the Balkan governments
are supported by Brussels in Washington (?).

But on another hand, we do have weak democratic alternatives in most of those
countries, strong monopolies, shaken civil society. And sa-- Beka said, almost ruined
independent-- media. And-- on the same time, we have increased our views of
media. We have a financial pressure-- to advertising unlawful subsidies to the--
government controlled media, court proceedings-- high fines for defamation, increase
the physical and verbal violence.

And-- murders, which-- many murders of journalists which-- have never been fully
resolved in the Balkans. Even we have a new-- government, but-- old cases are still
not-- resolved as-- killing of-- Churuvia, Pan, Iczovanowicz (PH) and many others.
So I really think that we can talk, that-- free media-- a fall of the free media in the
Balkans. And-- many of the Balkans blame media who-- against war and nationalism,
who was-- who has been supporting public interest and wanted to be independent no
longer exists.

Some have survived. But some of them now in the hands of the hidden-- (UNINTEL
PHRASE) course business elite of the governments-- who are trying to control-- the
media. There are many examples from Croatia to Serbia from-- Bosnia to
Montenegro and-- Macedonia. The-- one of the best weekly, which we had in the
region-- Croatian *Feral Trib-- Tribune*, which was actually the icon of the free media
in the Balkans, who-- has been mocking nationalism.

And-- well known for its independence from all-- authorities, not just Tudjman, but
those who came after Tudjman-- was closed in 2008. The *Feral* actually lost battle on
the-- on the market. They had-- actually a huge number of (UNINTEL) copies. But--
they-- were not able to obtain advertisers.

Another weekly which was not that-- great as a *Feral*-- was privatized in a non-
transparent deal following the murder of its owner and closed in 2012. This--
Nazionale (PH) actually discovered many of the abuses of the power and it is a rumor

that actually-- *Nazionale* was privatized by the guy through the offshore company by the guy who was one of the biggest mafia bosses in the Balkans-- and who has been-- smuggling cigarettes and *Nazionale* published many of the articles of him.

So he just took over the *Nazionale*, destroyed the archive, all articles and closed down. (SNIFF) In Serbia we have-- now-- democratic government supported by-- by-- by Europe. And-- on the other hand, we have complete disaster regarding-- not just free media, but-- civil-- society and democratic opposition. Opposition is completely destroyed.

And the new government which is very much supported by Brussels and Washington-- is trying to control most of the Serbian media and-- some of the partisans for the public interests-- actually-- now-- dying or becoming to be a commercial. And they are closing down the-- best-- shows that they have been bro-- broadcasting through B92. And they are completely actually changing the agenda.

Now on this B92, it is very hard to-- to see-- these stories about abuse of the state power. And-- of course we have a lot of problems in Serbia, but you cannot-- hear these stories through (NOISE) B92. The others are slowly dying as (UNINTEL PHRASE).

In Bosnia, we have same situation. Beka, you know Dani (PH) and Osto Bergenia (PH) both were symbols of the war resistance in Serbia, in-- in Bosnia now. They are in the hands of the (UNINTEL) families. In Macedonia, the-- p-- all this private television was closed down. The owner is-- in the jail. And-- situation is very, very bad. But-- the problem which we are facing in the Balkans is not just our problem. In many countries of the E.U. we actually have a lot of problem with the media freedom in Hungary. Restricted media laws are almost-- destroying free media.

In Italy, especially during the Berlusconi time was-- complete disaster as well. And among E.U. candidate-- candidate countries, the Turkey is an example of the highest of numbers of journalists in prison in the world. Since I'm coming from Montenegro, I will now focus on our case. In Montenegro-- maybe it's good to-- know-- a little bit about Montenegro.

It is the sm-- smallest of all ex-Yugoslav countries. It has only 600,000 people. So it's easy to control. The only Yugoslav-- ex-Yugoslav-- country (NOISE) which never changed the power through democratic elections. So since 1905, actually-- since our first constitution-- we changed power only through-- revolution, coups-- interparty coups-- acaps (PH)-- and-- the we can say actually (NOISE) that the same communist party is in power from 1945, they just changed the name.

BEKA VUCO:

And the (UNINTEL)--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

And-- and the same guy from '89 who is-- president or prime minister. He's-- actually holding on power in his hands. So if we have actually never changed to power through democratic elections-- it's-- it's I think-- a g-- a good question to actually ask: Do we have real democracy in this country?

And according to the Reporters Without Borders list-- and according to media freedom, we cannot really talk about democracy in these country. Montenegro is according this list on-- 114 place next to-- Charta, Nigeria, and Tajikistan. In Europe side by side with Montenegro is Macedonia, Russia and Byelorussia. While Serbia, which such a big problems in-- on fa-- 54th place in Bosnia on 68.

In many-- reports, human rights report from state department to U.N. In E.U. progress reports, there are serious concerns about the situation, the media situation and freedom of expression in Montenegro. And I will (PHONE) give you some examples how things are going there.

Last year, right after the Christmas-- a bomb exploded in front of the editor and chief office of the-- Daily *Vijesti*, one of the main-- daily which is now controlled by Mr. Jukanovich (PH). On two-- earlier occasions, (UNINTEL PHRASE) and the-- the cars have been (COUGH) set on fire several times.

A week after the bombing-- actually to-- up to today, we do not know who ordered this-- crime. We have two suspects-- have been-- in the jail. But they deny (NOISE) any association with the events. Who is behind, what are the motives? We do not know anything about that. As we do not know-- and as police did not solve many previous cases, murders of (UNINTEL) Yovanowich (PH) editor in chief of the main-- of another-- opposition daily (UNINTEL) and Sergei Yevoyacicz and attacks of many, many-- journalists-- who are not-- writing for the-- state-controlled media.

And the violence, the physical violence is not the only problem in Montenegro. Another kind of violence is actually verbal-- campaign against the representative of free-- free media. And this campaign is led by Prime Minister Milo Jukanovich. This one who never-- lost any elections.

So here are some quotes from Mr. Jukanovich. (PHONE) He's calling the representatives of independent media, media mafia, (UNINTEL) that need to be deauthorized (?). Some of us are deauthorized as-- as you saw. The biggest disaster of Montenegro. And he openly called-- to arrest-- Mier Drakperovic (PH), co-founder of daily *Vijesti* and weekly monitor. And of course this campaign is-- in most against independent media is in most-- of the-- paid person TV stations-- hundred of articles and new pieces just this year-- about-- media mafia has been published and broadcasted.

And in this pieces, *Vijesti* monitor Dan and some opposition leaders-- corrupted organized crime gangsters and female journalists are called prostitutes, courtesans. And they have been calling me prostitute-- in the-- in the media-- and-- so they are trying actually to destroy not just the media, but the private life of the people who

are-- working in media.

And something like this, I think, we'll see in some other countries, in some really-- dictator-- dictatorships. In Latin America, in Russia-- and in some other part. In-- in Africa, this to destroy you morally to-- you know, to-- to-- to-- to have a problem to go-- on street because you are-- not regular hum-- human being. You are someone who is trying to destroy the country. And you are actually the enemy of the state.

So this summer, we had couple of the-- I can say horrible examples, not just against the media representatives, but against the leading-- Anjia (PH) activists. One of our best-- Anjia activists, Vanya Sholowicz (PH), she's dealing a lot about d-- c-- corruption and abuse of the power.

She has been attacked for so-- of s-- of suddenly. And-- these attacks are based on a doctored video distributed by spin doctor of Prime Minister Jukanovich, Vladimir per-- Popovic. And-- 16 days, day after day, on the cover page, it was-- the picture from this-- video of the younger-- lady who looked like-- Vanya with two dogs doing some-- awful, awful things. And-- children-- and this-- this was-- on all kiosks presented, you know, th-- so visible, everyone can see. He had a special best position in all kiosks in Montenegro. And-- the Mr. Jukanovic and pro-g-- government media called for investigation of Sholowicz case.

And-- this campaign Sholowicz after her role in electoral manipulation discovery. So it was just maybe few weeks after-- after this. Now other civic activists are targets of this horrible propaganda. And what is interesting, this informer is actually founded in Serbia. But they-- they have Montenegrin agreement issuing same as some TV stations which are leading this-- campaign, TV Pink, you problem know-- about that.

And-- the media are-- pressured by other means, not just this-- propaganda to attacks. We have of course the financial pressure, 90% of advertising by state and public enterprises go to pro-government media. The government is-- giving illegal-- state aid to media which are under the-- under control of-- of the Montenegrin government. And then we have this-- TV stations and the other-- media from-- from Belgrade who are actually-- and we have this unfair competition on the TV market.

And actually we can say that we do not have a media market in Montenegro, not a free media market in Montenegro. Because if-- *Vijesti*, *Dan* and *Monitor* are having the biggest circulation and they are not having any other advertising-- advertising from the states-- and state is biggest-- and state-- enterprises are biggest for advertisers.

So you can imagine how strong is this pressure-- economic pressure in our media. And of course the other kind of the pressure are court cases and investigations. For example, in *Vijesti*-- in-- ongoing investigation for three years, you always have these guys from tax offices investigating, trying to find something. And you know, it's always ongoing investigations. They did not find anything up to now, but all state media and pro-government are saying it-- something is going on in *Vijesti*.

They are doing some illegal things and blah, blah, blah. Another thing is actually this-- suits against *Montior*, *Vijesti* and *Dan* amounted to 11 million euros. You can

imagine what that mean in the market in which you have only 600,000 what 11 million means for us. And we pay just in last couple of years 300,000 euros for defamation cases.

And of course all these fines, and most of these fines were against the praxis of the Strasburg court. This fine should be actually much lower. It should not economically ruin the media. And the famous cases-- which is ongoing right now, case of Fana Kolav (PH) the sister of prime minister Jukanovich. She is seeking hundreds of thousands of euros from *Dan*, *Vijesti*, and *Monitor*. For article on her role in the telecom privatization, and her role we did not discover. It was discovered, like actually here in United States ev-- and we just reported about this-- facts.

And of course the-- radio and TV show public show, called public, PBS, is supported by the states. But this does not mean that-- public-- TV is-- informing public interests. They are also giving primacy to the ruling parties and leading government officials. And-- editorial board instead to have a programs about education, the minority groups, is actually giving priority to entertainment and sports, to the commercial problems.

And that's how they are killing these other TV stations (SIREN) who are actually commercial. E.U. is-- regularly, in each progress report-- reporting about media freedom abuses in Montenegro. But now actions, now sanctions. especially in the area of-- illegal state aid to the sta-- to the s-- pro-government media. And E.U. has a m-- mandate to act according to the-- agreement, which we sign with Brussels.

E.U. will support Montenegro also in next six years, which 270 millions of euros, m-- hundred of million of euros will be f-- for the fighting corruption and organized crime and the rule of law. But there is no support-- support to the-- to the free media. And how can you fight corruption? And how can you have a rule of law if you do not have a freedom of media-- in the country and actually one of the judiciary, civil society, and media are crucial for this-- for this.

So I think these conclusions are of course this what the Montenegrin-- government is doing, I believe the many others, not just in the Balkans, but in the other countries, in-- in the-- in Europe and in the world are practicing. And-- in this-- digital environment and digital era, media actually, especially traditional media-- are much-- vulnerable because of the shrinking markets. And they became a real easy to target for the-- those who would like to control them.

Autocratic leaders increasingly abusing this economic weaknesses. And of course they are trying to gain control. And actually it is not difficult to control media today in the Balkans. The governments are the largest, as I said, advertisers and the employees, they control not only the state funds but-- they are controlling many private enterprises.

And-- in this situation, it is really-- much easier and there are no donors. So it's much easier to-- to-- to control media and to destroy those who've-- actually the-- most important for the democratic transition of our societies. I brought here some examples. Some pictures from the exhibition of last year, wall picture and enemy in

which we were presented as a state enemy. So this had our cover pages and-- they have been-- having this exhibition saying those guys-- are real enemies. You see how they are presenting our countries.

They are just talking about corruption and organized crime. They are not talking that we are the best example-- of-- in Europe, how-- how fast we are going to E.U. and how we are introducing the reforms. And-- this exhibition, our prime minister was presented with his closest allies.

And-- here are some books and some-- this-- those are the-- cover pages of this Informer which has been-- I don't know if you can see. This young lady is this Sholowicz accused of-- sodomy. And-- here is the cover page on the Informer saying that the honor of Vijesti is actually trying to Vijesti to the C.I.A. I mean, the same what the Russians did during the-- the communist era. (UNINTEL) and these are the cartoons-- which they-- have been-- publishing in many of the-- of the state-- pro-government media. So we are rub-- rubbish.

We are this big fish because Brussels is always saying that the big fish should be in jail, means those who are-- corrupted leaders and you know, we are of course the major probably. And we should in the jail. So this is-- a little from the--

BEKA VUCO:

Thanks mil-- thanks Milka. Obviously-- there is no clear straightforward answer how to fight this and what to do. But before-- before we-- open the floor and ask if any of you have questions or we do have couple of people online as well listening to this, so maybe there will be a question there.

Let me just-- I just wanna clarify and add something to Milka's presentation from the position of our foundation and from the f-- so to-- to clear and to put it in the perspective of our work in the Balkans. So that-- not only my colleagues from the office, but also our guests today-- would have-- full picture.

It is a paradox in a way and-- Milka was giving you really-- a very thorough, in-depth information on the Montenegro side. But all the media that she has mentioned in her presentation from A to Z, all the names of the newspapers that you've seen, we have sponsored, we have helped. Some of them we began. We began. We gave the seed money. Some of them, we actually--

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Including the ones the sodomy covered?

(OVERTALK)

BEKA VUCO:

Well-- some of them-- no, no. I said in the past. I said in the past. Some of them actually we-- funded on an ongoing basis for years and years and years. As I said, through the National Foundation Media problems, in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia, or through our media problem and independent (UNINTEL) program that exists within the Open Society Foundation.

At one point, we said enough. And at that time-- as our-- I would say a spin off of the media program was created, which is called the media development. Now it's called media development investment fund. A station here in New York for a very long time headed by Sascha Vusonic (PH) who was one of the establishers, founders of the B92.

Today, the executive director is Harlan Mandell (PH). Unfortunately he's not here tonight. Today we invited him. So they in a way took over our role-- in helping the independent media in the Balkans by giving them loans for their development, for their work so that they face the situation as different media in Europe as well, not only to get a grant, like, you know, you-- you're on the budget of OSF and you every year, you get this grant.

But nevertheless, for instance, yes the, as Milka was mentioning-- they have been heavily supported by the media development-- fund. And they have been aware of this situation in Montenegro in spite of that. If you will look at the-- if we look at the map of the Balkans today, and if we look at the media situation and do we help media in the Balkans.

That's obviously, do we as the foundation, aside from the media-- loan the-- invested in fund, do we-- do we help? We only have a media program in two countries as a separate media program. We have a program in Macedonia. And we have a program in Serbia. But that does not mean that we do not help media. We do. We-- we help through different ways, through different means, through different programs. And we use media.

We-- we help in through our civil society programs where-- where we develop topics, we help through different fellowships and investigative journalists-- journalism-- inputs and different media. We also help regionally. Recently there as been a program established by BIRN, which is the Balkan Investigative Reporting Fund, a regional organization for all the independent media in the Balkans, which we also helped establish. But that's not important.

At this point, they have a very interesting and important program which is the Balkan fellowships for journalistic excellence. And we-- through our office in Barcelona, through Osifa (PH) office that (UNINTEL) for Europe are heavily involved with other-- western European donors. The Estef (PH) foundation, a Czech donor, and Balshiftung in funding this-- this fellowship program throughout the Balkans.

So Open Society Foundation, even though we don't have a per se, a separate media program, is still involved very much in helping media. Obviously, not enough. We have shifted-- just one more thought. We have shifted from r-- radio, television,

newspapers, now to the-- new ways of communication. So we-- we support different blogs, we support different web medias, many of them extremely popular. But it's not enough.

People still when they come home turn on the television. People who we want to reach still buy the daily newspaper even though it has become really expensive in a way. So if there is solution, we ask ourselves and-- it is not a question that we can find an answer right now, because obviously we would have acted on it if there is an easy, easy, easy answer. So I'll stop here. Milka, you wanted to say something--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Yeah, I wanted to say that actually, the support from-- MDIF-- was the main reason for *Vijesti* to stay in business. They have been after such pressure from the authorities. But thanks to the investment of the media-- investment fund, and not just investment, but pressure from the-- United States because this fund is-- U.S. fund.

And this is actually one of the rare U.S. investment Montenegro, is-- through-- through Soros (PH)-- investment fund. That's how they survive-- not just the paper but the TV statement. But-- even this support, I think they are holding-- twenty-f-- they are having 25% of the shares of daily and I believe 20 or 25 as well of the-- even more of the TV station. But they are trying to find the solution. How to-- how to-- survive under such circumstances. And it is really very hard. It is really very hard.

BEKA VUCO:

I actually began my-- my sentence by saying this-- it is a paradox. And it is. On one hand you have a situation which Milka very nicely presented here of a really terrible situation in the Balkans. But then on the other hand, you have this quote-unquote "democratic" societies that are on their way to Europe.

And if we read as Milka pointed out, any of the Brussels reports, and one is coming in about ten days for last year-- we are going to si-- have the same absolutely wording that we had last year and the year before and the year before. And there is nothing we can do. They support these new-- newly composed-- democratic governments who have just changed their names and changed their clothes.

And now they are all pro-Europe-- pro-Europe, pro-- pro E.U., pru-- pro-- accession. But it is a very difficult and very serious situation because media freedom-- is-- si-- not and a media non-freedom in those countries is a sign of rather closed societies. And societies which, you know, for instance, in Macedonia-- Macedonia is more and more looking like Hungary in-- in every sense. And-- unfortunately media as well. Okay. I will stop here. Oh, one more thing I wanted to say. Just how-- how we-- as the foundation were also touched by this terrible situation in Montenegro.

Last November, there was the conference that they organized. Actually it was the--

NGO in-- in Montenegro that organized the conference but behind the NGO was the government and this Mr. Popovic. And they quoted us as one of the sponsors of the conference. They put our name and our logo on the huge billboards throughout Montenegro and all the materials and so on and so on.

It is true that we were approached by the organizers and asked whether we will be funding this conference. And I personally wrote a letter after discussing and seeing who is behind, saying, "No. Thank you very much. We wish you a nice conference. We will not sponsor." But nevertheless, we-- we were there. We were there. And Milka knows, it was-- it was a battle that we could not win. I-- I think I sent about 20 different emails asking them to, you know, change this-- nothing, nothing. Finally, obviously the next step was to go to court.

And after talking with our legal office here, we decided not to go that way because it would only harm the media in the country, it would harm Mr. Soros' name in Montenegro. And it would harm the foundation. So we lost that battle. Anyway. Questions?

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

It's-- well, it was actually a good example of manipulation. How they are manipulating. They do not (UNINTEL) about facts, you know. And they needed your name.

BEKA VUCO:

Do we have any questions? Whoever is listening to us? Please? Oh we have a question.

FEMALE BEKA VUCO:

Do you any information about the situation in Albania?

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

We can say that situation in Albania is-- much better-- especially after the changes of the government. But of course (UNINTEL) tried to control media in-- in the past. Had many--

BEKA VUCO:

Previous prime ministers--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

--yes, previous-- previous prime minister. I have many close colleagues in-- in-- in Albania. And it was actually the time when some topics-- they did not touch. It was very difficult to talk about the abuses of the power, of both-- about mafia or connections between mafia and those in the power. But-- I think that situation in k-- in Albania is improving since we have a new government that...

BEKA VUCO:

If I could just add. Thank you for including Albania in the Balkans. It's very much present there obviously and my office covers-- covers the work in Albania as well. It is true, yes. I agree with Milka that the situation is much better at this point.

The head of our board, the chair of our board is a very prominent journalist and the head of the major media center in Tirana and Zulani (PH). And he himself obviously will never be happy what is the situation of the-- of the independent media. But what is important also, and maybe Darien (PH) can add something since he-- (UNINTEL) local Albanian here.

But what is very important is also the regional cooperation among the different media-- in the region and-- something-- that we helped build and Ramzi and his media institution in Tirana is one of the initiators of the coalition of different media centers throughout the network. So we have everything. We have all these organizations. We have the power. We have the people. But it's impossible really to fight the--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

But you know, Ramzi is doing really great job together with some others from other centers--

(OVERTALK)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

--from Slovenia and some others. They are-- writing a lot about the media integrity. Because we are all actually-- this is a very important-- question in all Balkan states. Do we really have-- media integrity there? Do we really have a real media who are writing about real problems, who are taking care after the-- public interests? And they are doing great-- great things. And this coalition, and these regional projects are very, very-- important for us. And they had-- an excellent conference-- in May, I think. It was really--

BEKA VUCO:

The head of the OSCE-- stationed in Vienna, for the media, director of the media for the-- for the Balkans is a woman from Sarajevo. So obviously, through her we have access easily or easier to-- to-- to-- to that-- that-- so as I said, we have all the players are sold to stay on our side. But still the situation still is-- is quite-- quite difficult. And-- since your question-- in regarding the Albania-- if I may say, if we look at the map of the Balkans today, I think-- Albania is the most democratic country of the ones presently today in the Balkans.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Wow.

(OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Look at that. Yeah. Well, we finally had a fair election. So. I don't know it's been 100 years or what. So that was big. Now I think it's-- I mean, it sounds like-- it's-- I had-- I had in-- now it sounds that i-- it was so bad in the sense of-- the media of Montenegro (UNINTEL) surrounded, a few independent voices.

And in that sense, Albania is slightly better. We haven't had-- murders, I don't think in-- many years-- or anyone in jail. They just-- they formed defamation laws. And there are more-- open voice-- it's not so-- so monolithically sort of government controlled. And there is an explosion of opinion. There is so much free opinion. The-- the-- anytime of the day you open the u-- there's six opinions. And anyone with--

BEKA VUCO:

But that's good. That's democracy.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Well, yes. Anyone we've-- or without any credentials, they-- they have a local word that makes his experts with like plumbers or something like that. But-- but investigative journalism, I think-- I think it's still very weak.

So there's a lot of-- free opinion based on very few facts. The production of facts is controlled by the-- the political class itself. And so there are leaks here and there. And that's where the scandals come from. But not from journalism itself.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Not the real stories. Not as I said before about the-- the-- the (UNINTEL) investigations actually. And that is very--

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

They-- they're pretty--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

--important for all these countries. So yeah.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

(UNINTEL) between and in fact I-- I al-- I always thought it was fascinating that the most hard-hitting program in Albania at-- at least on television is-- is a comedy show. It's like-- that's a typical example of-- of system that's not entirely democratic, right? What-- sort of you have to resign to satire because you cannot come out say things with a straight face. That's-- sort of a typical, underdog reaction in-- in a system.

FEMALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

It sounds like here.

BEKA VUCO:

Yeah exactly. (LAUGHTER) We watch Jon Stewart. Exactly. Colbert.
(OVERTALK)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

We know you are running from the problems, you know, and we are trying to-- you know, to sing all day long.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

I did have one question though which is-- I work for a program, yeah, that has-- done a lot of work on financial censorship-- or indirect censorship. Most of it has been in Latin America. But we're also now moving to-- Central and Eastern Europe.

And-- la-- last year we-- funded-- we're working with a world association of newspapers-- in Paris. And-- and national groups in Hungary and Serbia. And they did-- the first two national reports, country studies on how the governments are-- using different forms of financial choking, pressure points to control the media. And it sounds like a big theme from what you're saying. 'Cause it's-- it's not easy to, you know, throw people in jail or-- well, they're still beating them up on the streets.

But anyway, but it-- it's a much-- cleaner way of controlling the media. There's no international outrage. So I wanted to ask a little bit about the-- the mechanisms. I mean, you talked about 40 million euros that they're putting into the market in some way. Now that can buy a lot of friendship. I mean, that's a lot of money for a small market like Montenegro.

(MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC: UNINTEL)

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

How exactly-- what kinds of mechanisms-- and you're right. Some of these raise very serious issues under-- like Hungary is a member state. And they're subject to competition laws. So if these are secret subsidies, hidden subsidies, they raise very serious competition issues.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

So we have the same situation in many of those countries. But a good example are both Montenegro and Serbia. And Serbia what they did even during this-- democratic government of Tadic (PH)-- they centralized the advertising. And-- most advertisers actually has been going through couple of the advertising agencies.

In all of these agencies, they're actually owned or controlled by the people from the democratic party. And if you are not in line with the democratic party, you might have a big trouble getting advertising, not just from the enterprises controlled by the local-- authorities, but this international-- the huge companies as telecom and others. (COUGH) They can of course cut you always if you are not in the line with the-- with the-- with the-- with the BS.

And Voojic (PH) of course just took all of these agencies, so you have a centralized ag-- agency-- advertising agency. The same we have in Montenegro. (SIREN) Couple of the agencies which are completely controlled by the-- those in power, and what was happening to me-- I-- have been-- when I have been talking with the potential-- advertisers, many of them-- not-- not many of them.

But few of them told me. Listen, I would like to support you. But please do not publish my ad in your paper. (LAUGH) And I said, "How do you think? How can you support me?" He said, "I will-- I will-- I will-- send me a bill for consultation or whatever, con-- consulting things. But-- but just don't tell because if they see that I am having ad in your paper, it will be-- it-- it will mean that I am actually against the

current-- government so I might have a lot of problems.

And of course they are controlling most of the businesses in Montenegro. But how they have been s-- putting this money in the pro-government media, of course through advertising-- then-- through illegal state aid. This (UNINTEL) oldest daily in Montenegro controlled by the-- ruling party, was supported with-- government money, which is completely-- against our law and against-- the agreement which we signed with Brussels aga-- against this competition always and-- this.

And-- but they have been supporting openly without any-- problem and they put 25 million of euros in this daily in last couple of years. And actually daily is functioning illegally because according to our media law, this daily supposed to be privatized in 2004. But they never privatize the daily.

And the daily published in last three or four years, a hundred of-- hundreds of articles about the media mafia, the prostitutes which are (LAUGH) working in this media-- about-- about us. It's one of the-- major-- tool of Mr. Jukonovich to-- to actually ruin (?)-- ruin us.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Does anyone read them? (UNINTEL PHRASE)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

They are having-- they are having--
(OVERTALK)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

You know what-- they-- not many. Not many. But they are having-- this how you call this-- ob-- ob--

VOICES:

Obituaries.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

And of course the old people are living and that's how they are-- they are-- they are selling the-- the--
(OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

That's-- that's a-- that's a solid market, right? (LAUGHTER)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

It is actually.

BEKA VUCO:

That-- that newspaper if I may add-- had two very shameful periods of their journalism. First one was in '90s when the war started because they were controlled by the government. They were there to promote, to justify, to-- engage-- in-- in war with in-- in Balkan-- region, especially Montenegrin-- dealings with Dubrovnik and-- and Bombay (?) area.

And a second sh-- even more shameful period is this one where they-- when they took-- on-- Milka and her colleagues in independent media. That's-- the-- the worst thing that actually-- that happens is that-- it's not aversion of media. It's aversion of code of ethics in journalism. Because the head of that newspaper is a former, famous journalist who worked for-- in Prague for a radio.

(OVERTALK)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

And he was considered like-- free journalist with high ethics. Obviously not. And-- (MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC): UNINTEL)

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Yeah. Yeah. And he's editor in chief who signed the-- the-- the worst, disgusting articles that that newspaper every published and join him another ex-hero, Lukovic and such and such and such. I mean, I don't want to dignify pronouncing their names because it's really shame on the profession.

FEMALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Could you take down Jukonovich's photo?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

So you mentioned journalists without borders at the beginning, that they came out with the rankings. Are they involved-- more specifically in the Balkans with anything else, with any advocacy surrounding-- freedom of media or are they working the Balkan--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

(UNINTEL) without borders are generally I think-- working the-- the-- the biggest mission is this-- index of freedom list-- which they are releasing each year. But their role and their reports were so important for us because they are so-- they are so realistic. And they actually-- are helping us to present to the others where we are.

Like, they are not-- having any special projects in the-- in the Balkans because they are with the-- filled is mostly this-- (UNINTEL) index. Of course they are reacting when we have a problems they are having, they are writing this open letters and-- the prompt reactions and committee to protect journalists as well from the *New Yorker* had couple of the reactions because of the situation in Montenegro and other Balkan countries.

FEMALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Sorry. Just a follow up question. So has this helped at all with-- engaging civil society? You mentioned that it's all-time low since the '90s. Has this helped at all?

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

I mean, y-- media apart I think of the civil society. And-- I think all what is going on with media actually hurting a lot civil society. And not just the civil society, but democratic alternatives in this-- in this region. So--

BEKA VUCO:

But-- but if I can just add to that. However, there-- there is a number of quite active and good NGOs in Montenegro. Some of them-- mil-- Milka mentioned like months, that from (UNINTEL) Vanya Shalowicz, it's a watchdog organization that has been-- you know, extremely active. Very courageous, extremely courageous and important for the corruption issues that, you know, they published almost I don't wanna say daily, but I would say weekly.

Some reporting on some findings-- that they have. The other organizations are s-- number of small think tanks like Alternativa (PH) another one by headed by Stella Muk (PH) or-- a very good organization, Milka mentioned her name because she has

also been under the attack. It's the-- NGO which is headed by Daliber Koljadivic (PH).

And I would have to say that there is a newcomer to the media stage in Montenegro just-- I will say four or five years ago. And it's-- it's a human rights organization headed by Tehar Gordians (PH) (UNINTEL). All these we have been helping through the OSF funds either by-- through the think tank fund, mostly or the human rights initiative or through the parts of the foundation that we had to unfortunately close two years ago in-- in (UNINTEL). But that's another story. I won't go into that right now.

Also we support a number of Roma-- organizations and LGBT-- scene which is quite active in Montenegro. For instance Montenegro was the host of-- at the presidency of the Romadecade last year. Now Bosnia to (UNINTEL) July 1st. So there is a vibrant civil society I would say. Not an easy place to be vibrant there and-- and loud and open. But there is. There is a solid number of organizations as well as there is huge amount of those which are small, tiny. But they also deal with some issues which are women's issues or environmental issues, extremely important in Montenegro. Or some other aspects of-- of-- so yes. I cannot say no because that's-- that's the reality. (OVERTALK)

BEKA VUCO:

But it's--

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

It's difficult and what is really good, we are cooperating with all of them. We are acting together. It's a great solidarity among us. This couple of the organization and us we are-- really doing together an excellent-- work. But-- I mean, it's really difficult for-- for-- for many of them to-- to-- work.

BEKA VUCO:

You had a question.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

Yeah, I-- it was v-- very related actually. At-- in addition to civil society, I'm curious-- whether in general-- the opinions of society in general and also government, but also in particular to the rankings-- by journalists without borders, whether-- whether the-- those poorer numbers-- have or will affect government behavior in-- in Montenegro or in other countries in the Balkans. And you know, if-- if the public at large is even

aware of it. And if so-- what their perceptions or reactions are.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Unfortunately this report did not help media. And-- you can see from the list, we are dropping down year by year. And-- I think the other countries will as well-- have a problem. I'm sure this year (UNINTEL) Serbia will-- will go down for many places.

So even pressure from the E.U. And E.U. is now the major partner of our government is not helping much. Simply I think because independent media are having the role to discover all known transparent deal-- all bad privatization to write about to the bad behavior of those in the power. And that is what our governments in the region would-- would like to stop.

All of this media which I mention, which are having this-- big fight with the authorities are actually-- discovering together with these NGOs-- all this-- stories about the-- manipulation of the-- those in the power, their connections with the-- ba-- with the non-transparent businesses, connections with the mafia. The-- the-- the other things. So that's simply, they would like to stop.

BEKA VUCO:

If-- if-- if we are closely, you know, out of the time, but I would absolutely welcome some other questions if-- if anybody has. But while you're thinking about your questions, let me-- let me just put a comment. It's-- it's-- it's really a shame that-- nobody's really paying attention to what is happening in that part of the world. Because obviously the different world affairs-- took the attention from the Balkans, whether today is-- unfortunately Ebola or tomorrow something that is happening in Sudan or Burma or so on.

I can understand that. And obviously-- similarly at the Open Society Foundations, we fight to find our space among many other things that are on the plate for-- for-- for everybody who is competing, I would "competing" quote-unquote for the funds. But-- there is still-- there is still-- help we do get. We have-- five foundations in the region open. Montenegro is the only country unfortunately that we do not have a foundation there.

These foundations are active. Some of them are high priority at one point. For instance Albania at this moment, because of the very democratic government of Prime Minister Rama. Some are not even at all-- people are not interested so we have to balance that and-- and-- and juggle that. But as I said-- all these countries are on their way to the European Union slowly, slowly.

Some of them are-- lagging behind like Bosnia or Kosovo d-- for obvious reasons. But there is some hope, whether the E.U. goal will be 2025, or '30. We don't know. It's not important. The process is important. The process of the democratization of those societies is what it counts. And-- we do hope that one day, maybe not while

we're around. Jukonovich will not be in power anymore.

Or-- Vucic will really the pre-- the prime minister in Serbia will really be-- democratic force in that country. But in general, the Balkans are not a finished story. It is an unfinished story still. And we still have to do a lot. And I'm glad that both Mr. Soros and Kriston understand this position and are not reducing the funds. And are not actually-- you know, getting us away from that vision that we still exist. So that's good.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

I think that is the major problem of the Balkans, its unfinished story and the-- and those-- leaders, you know, they learn something for-- for years. I mean, they have now this policy, they are very-- they are very cooperating with the west. They are supporting most of the west-- politics.

But internal politics, it's horrible. In most of the countries. They are trying to kill all of those to-- I mean-- all the-- resistance, the mo-- they are not-- not-- we are-- when they are not just media that isn't-- but for example, free market. We do not have a free market in these countries. Now everything is controlled by the authorities. They are controlling every single business. Especially in this-- in my country, we have only 600,000 people. So if you would like to have a business, you really need to be connected.

Even if you have a small restaurant, you have to be connected. They do not stand an independent-- position because independent is always a big-- problem for dictators or autocrats or whatever you call them. So they are controlling whole society. They are controlling voters. You mentioned that you finally had a free elections in Albania. We are still waiting for the free elections in Montenegro.

They are controlled-- they are just buying the votes before the elections. They are-- if you would like-- if you are not voting for us, you might have a lot of problems. You can w-- lose your job if you are-- because we are the biggest employers. Yeah? Or you cannot have your business. Or your kids will not have a scholarship. Or we simply, if you are that poor, because in Montenegro, we have 30% of the people who are on the line of the poverty. So you can buy them for 50 euros.

So if you do not have a free election, how you can have a free media? How you can have a free market? And how actually you can have a normal, open society? That is actually what western powers do not understand how those societies are deeply controlled. They will-- our-- our authorities will support Washington in this ISIS (?) story or they will support Brussels in the battle-- other bat-- in battle with Russia whatever. But on another hand, they will completely control everything inside.

MALE VOICE (OFF-MIC):

It's what Mr. Putin calls managed democracy.

VOICES:

Yeah.

BEKA VUCO:

I thank you all for coming, our colleagues and our guests here from outside. And Milka thank you very much.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Thank you.

BEKA VUCO:

We can revisit this subject in (UNINTEL) since you will be in New York for some time and maybe jointly with some other guests that we have so that we can put the Balkans even more on the map of OSF. Thank you very much.

MILKA TADIC MIJOVIC:

Thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *