Report from the Conference:

"Media Reporting on Peace, Conflict and Security Issues – how objective and conflict-sensitive is media coverage and reporting on these issues?"

31 March 2014, Hotel Sirius, Prishtinë/Priština

Introduction

On the 31st March 2014, FIQ and AKTIV, with support from Saferworld organized a conference titled **"Media Reporting on Peace, Conflict and Security Issues – how objective and conflict-sensitive is media coverage and reporting on these issues?"**

This activity is within project implementation funded by EU Civil Society Facility for Kosovo "Empowering civil society organizations in Kosovo to become effective contributors to security policy and decision-making processes",

The aim of this conference was to present publicly the report as well as to discuss with stakeholders from the media, security institutions and the civil society on citizens in Kosovo perception of the conflict-sensitivity and the objectivity of media coverage on issues related to peace, conflict and security in Kosovo.

This report was produced jointly by eleven organisation including two members of Forum for Security in Prishtina/Priština, three members of Conflict Prevention Forum in the North, six local CSOs from different municipalities and two project partners AKTIV and FIQ.

For the purpose of this research, community dialogue meetings in "focus group" setup with citizens of the following 7 municipalities were organized: Prishtinë/Priština, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Prizren, Leposaviq/Leposavić and Zubin Potok. The focus groups were mixed in terms of ethnicity, gender and social background.

The roundtable gathered representatives from institutions such as Ministry of Kosovo Security Force, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Police; international organizations, including OSCE, ICITAP, security analysts and civil society activists.

Summary of key discussions

The conference was officially opened by Mr. Nazim Haliti from FIQ, whereas the introductory remarks were presented by Mr. Ferdinand Nikolla from Saferworld. Mr. Nikolla stated that non-governmental organizations have not tackled this subject to the required extent, with election periods being an exception in this case, and that it is of utmost importance to discuss the objectivity of the media reporting on security related issues. Mr Nikolla added that media has also major impact on the level of public trust towards the institutions, and this is because media is always closer to the institutions. In this regard few questions were raised by Mr Nikolla, such as 'Is there objective media reporting when it comes to issues related to peace, conflict and security in Kosovo? Are arrests (related to corruption, war crimes) sensational, or media makes them as such? Why nobody is talking anymore about the decision of Independent Media Commission from last year to prohibit media to use the names of political parties, and their candidates during the election silence? Is competition pushing media in Kosovo to report more on negative issues (scandals), rather than positive, so that they can attract public attention? Online media is very often dealing with religious issues, and the problem is that for many of them, we don't know who the owner (editor) is.

The findings of the report were presented by its author, Mr. Shkamb Qavdërbasha, INDEP researcher (Forum for Security member).

The main findings from the citizens' perception related to media reporting, emphasizing are hereby as following:

- Applicable legislation in Kosovo regulates media through two regulatory bodies: Press Council of Kosovo and Independent Media Commission, which regulate the press and broadcasting media. There are no regulatory bodies for online media, which is also the cause of their sharp increase in numbers.

- Nowadays, media should remain one of the main pillars of peace-building. As they are having direct outreach to a considerable portion of the population, media are in a good position to support stability and security-related efforts. In a place with a large number of different ethnic groups and violent past, media need to exert special attention when covering emotionally-charged issues, as failure in doing so threatens to increase tensions.

- Pristina-Belgrade dialogue has been taken priority in media coverage in last couple of months. Reporting on the dialogue is pushed forth by national media, and is perceived to be generally impartial, however, there is a perceived potential of inciting conflict due to the ambiguity and perceived lack of reporting objectivity on this issue.

- Citizens in general do not follow media emitted in the language of the other ethnicities, with the exception of older generations among Albanian population, as stated by the

participants. However, it can be concluded that there is a general perception that the media in Kosovo, when covering an issue related to other ethnicity, tend to report in biased manner, not repelling even employing of conflict-inducing language.

After the report presentation, the floor was opened for panellists. Mr. Naim Rashiti of Balkans Policy Research Group emphasized the fact that the approach utilized in the case of this report should continue and should even expand further to the region. In addition, Mr. Rashiti stated that media involvement on security issues is insufficient and that the media have not been active enough in reconciling ethnic groups. The approach of Albanian and Serbian media to opposite ethnic groups (the approach of Albanian media toward Serbian population and vice versa) is seen as more of a problem by him. He said that as a consequence of the legal context in Kosovo, Serb and Albanian media employ different interpretations.

Mr. Rashiti identifies as key issues to be taken into consideration the fact that media in general have not been part in the reconciliation process among two main ethnicities (Albanian and Serbs) and in addition he stated that: "both Albanian and Serbian media follow the political orientation of respective governments. I also think that there's a lack of communication between citizens and journalists. In order to come to some sort of resolution, or improvement of media's role in shaping citizens perception in respect to safety and security issues the approach should change from top to bottom, meaning that the approach with regard to security issues should change first at the political and governmental levels, as they affect the media translation of important political messages into reliable information for citizens to absorb and shape their perceptions".

Executive Director of FIQ, Ms. Dajana Berisha, first acknowledged the multidimensionality of the research , given that it aims to contribute to the existing literature on media reporting on peace, conflict and security issues, to provoke a public debate on these sensitive topics and finally to receive people's perceptions about the role of media in this process of peace reconciliation. In addition she also elaborated that it is agreeable from most of the participants that society in Kosovo is in the process of building a social cohesion where all societal actors, political and apolitical stakeholders stand at certain parallel level within the society.

Mr. Ibrahim Shala, Head of the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Kosovo Security Force talked about three cases of media victims involving police and security officers due to speculations made regarding a murder case. He stressed that public is faced with unprofessional media due to lack of security sector journalists "Also, when it comes to high political topics, media should be very careful to protect the national state interest", Shala added.

Mr. Hamdi Mehmeti, journalist of News TV stressed that the coverage of dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina should have more sensitive approach by the media. A positive trend in Kosovar journalism is the development of investigative approach.

Mr. Rifat Marmullaku, security expert representing OSCE, agreed that there is lack of professionalism in reporting security issues provided that as a former police officer he considers reporting a murder is a complex matter in journalism. "Media needs trainings on reporting

security related issues, and it is not easy for journalists as many institutions are not open and transparent, Mr. Marmullaku added.

Mr. Brahim Sadriu, Kosovo Police spokesman, said that KP and media have constructive relations, and media reports are promotional but also critical towards them.

Mr. Branislav Nešović, AKTIV Program Director, talked about relations between Serbs and Albanians and the lack of understanding between two communities that has been reflected in other aspects, including the media reporting. "Besides political control they could have been subordinated to, financial dependency is also a big challenge for media. Media reporting in general is full of stereotypes, for instance, media in the South, generalizes about the North and portrays it as a territory full of criminals, while in the North there are not that many media who are following the news from the South said Mr. Nešović. He stressed that there is only one online media in the north which follows and comments on Albanian media coverage.

Conclusions:

- The media aims to report as objectively as possible, however this is frequently accompanied by a trend of sensationalistic reporting in order to further draw public's attention;
- There is a lack of specialized journalists that cover mainly security issues, and the journalists of this topic are frequently replaced, which impacts the level of professionalism during reporting;
- The media are proactive in following and reporting on important social, political and security developments, however, certain media editors/journalists should be more involved in constructive debates, such as the one of today, that directly targets them, in order to increase the quality of media reporting on relevant issues that impact the perception of the citizens on peace and security in Kosovo;
- The political climate in the country, in general, is the determining factor for the spirit and the approach of the media reports on sensitive issues.
- More emphasis should be given to achievement of real media independence (especially financial)   to stop the inclusion of hidden agendas and contribute to unbiased and professional reporting.

Participants:

1. Rifat Marmullaku, analyst
2. Ymeri Thaçi, MIA
3. Ibrahim Shala, MKSF
4. Elvedina Megjuani, journalist
5. Florentina Makolli journalist
6. Beadin Syla, Kosovapress
7. Senad Kamenica, OSCE
8. Naim Rashiti, BPRG
9. Dajana Berisha, FIQ
10. Nazim Haliti, FIQ
11. Arieta Rexhepi, FIQ
12. Ferdinand Nikolla, Saferworld
13. Arianita Beqa-Rraci, Saferworld
14. Branislav Nesovic, AKTIV
15. Jana Poljakova, AKTIV
16. Nart Orana, INDEP
17. Enver Dugolli, MKSF
18. Hamdi Mehmeti, News TV
19. Hamdi Bytyqi, News TV
20. Lulzim Fushtica, ICITAP
21. Arben Hajredinaj, OSCE
22. Aferdita Duraku, RTV21
23. Valdete Berisha, Kosova Sot
24. Diellza Kryeziu, ETNIKA
25. Bedri Uka, NGO 'Shpëtimtari'

The full report can be found here:

Albanian

http://fiq-fci.org/repository/docs/FS_RAPORTIMI-MEDIAVE-PAQEN.pdf

English

http://fiq-fci.org/repository/docs/MEDIA-REPORTING-ON-PEACE%202014.pdf

Serbian

http://ngoaktiv.org/fajlovi/FB,%20MEDIJSKO%20IZVE%C5%A0TAVANJE%20O%20MIRU.
..mart.2014.pdf