International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans: A Cross-National Comparison

Kristina Irion & Tarik Jusić

Abstract: International media assistance programs accompanied the democratic media transition in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia with varying intensity. These countries untertook a range of media reforms to conform with accession requirements of the European Union (EU) and the standards of the Council of Europe, among others. This article explores the nexus between the democratic transformation of the media and international media assistance (IMA) as constrained by the local political conditions in the five countries of the Western Balkans. It aims to enhance the understanding of conditions and factors that influence media institution building in the region and evaluates the role of international assistance programs and conditionality mechanisms herein.

The cross-national analysis concludes that the effects of IMA are highly constrained by the local context. A decade of IMA of varying intensity is not sufficient to construct media institutions when, in order to function properly, they have to outperform their local context. From today's vantage point it becomes obvious, that in the short-term scaling-up IMA does not necessarily improve outcomes. The experiences in the region suggest that imported solutions have not been sufficiently cognitive of all aspects of local conditions and international strategies have tended to be rather schematic and have lacked strategic approaches to promote media policy stability, credible media reform and implementation. To a certain extent, the loss of IMA effectiveness is also self-inflicted.

Keywords: democratic transformation, media institutions, international media assistance, Western Balkan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania

Introduction

Countries of the Western Balkans are in the process of democratic transition which also entails building their media institutions. Throughout the region the transformation paths of the media systems converge in what can be considered the European media model. International media assistance (hereafter: IMA) programs accompanied the democratic media transition in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: BiH), Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia with varying intensity. In

addition, these countries untertook a range of media reforms to conform with accession requirements of the European Union (EU) and the standards of the Council of Europe, among others.

While recognising the progress made in various areas, sustainable and functioning media institutions are rare in these Western Balkan countries. The reasons why the emergence of key media institutions has not been achieved are similar throughout the region, i.e. the nature of local media markets, lackluster implementation of media reforms, political interference in the media sector, and weak professionalization but strong instrumentalization of journalism. Democratic media transformation has never been a linear process but retrogressive developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia have already offset some of the progress made. Today, media development across the region is comparatively stagnant and in some countries the situation may deteriorate further.

This article is the outcome of a regional research project which explores the nexus between the democratic transformation of the media and IMA as constrained by the local political conditions in the five countries of the Western Balkans. It aims to enhance the understanding of conditions and factors that influence media institution building in the region and evaluates the role of international assistance programs and conditionality mechanisms herein. Of particular interest is the question of what happens to imported models when they are transposed onto the newly evolving media systems of transitional societies in the Western Balkans. The cross-national analysis is used to query how the varying intensity of international assistance impacts the democratic transformation of media.

This cross-national analysis builds on multi-level country studies by a team of collaborators whose individual contributions we would like to acknowledge.[1] The theoretical background underpinning this research combines three strands of literature: first, theories on democratization and democratic consolidation, second, transition in post-authoritarian countries and Europeanization, and third, concepts of international assistance and development. The transformation of local media systems is not considered in isolation but as part of a larger transformation process of the social and political system (Jakubowicz 1995). Data collection in the five countries followed a unified methodology that revisits these theories in the local context.

The article concludes that the effects of IMA are highly constrained by the local context. A decade of IMA of varying intensity is not sufficient to construct media institutions when, in order to function properly, they have to outperform their local context. From today's vantage point it becomes obvious, that in the short-term scaling up IMA does not necessarily improve outcomes. The experiences in the region suggest that imported solutions have not taken into account all aspects of local conditions and international strategies have tended to be rather schematic and have lacked a strategic approach to promote media policy stability, credible media reform and implementation. To a certain extent, the loss of IMA effectiveness is also self-inflicted.

The article proceeds as follows: After a brief overview of the countries in the Western Balkan region, Section 3 covers democratic media transition in the context of the political and economic situation. Section 4 covers IMA in the Western Balkans and how it interacts with local conditions. In Section 5, the achievements and pitfalls of media democratization are discussed followed by the conclusions.

A Brief Note on Methodology

The comparative analysis synthesizes the five country case-studies which were produced following a unified methodology that draws from the relevant literature (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013; Londo 2013; Marko 2013; Miftari 2013). It also incorporates a cross-national comparison of public service broadcasting in these countries by Mark Thompson (2013).

The research design takes a multi-level approach: First, for each country data on the political and the media system in addition to the IMA have been collected before describing in depth the transition path of three to four specific media institutions (Table 1).[2] The country case-studies are based on desk research and direct contact with donors in order to obtain relevant data. For the in-depth case-studies, the authors of the country case-studies conducted between six and ten interviews with local media experts and representatives of international donor organizations about the influence of IMA on media institution building. Applying a focus on the country the case-studies allow for a comparison of these media institutions in order to investigate why certain policy sub-systems flow better through transformational stages than others and whether this yields a distinct outcome of IMA.

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[2] For their central role in the national media system, the media regulatory authority and the public service media operator are covered for each country. Additionally, one to two other country-specific media institutions are included – such as a commercial media outlet, a media self-regulatory body or a media advocacy organization – allowing for diversification across countries, provided the organization was the beneficiary of IMA.

Table 1: Country case-studies and in-depth case studies

Country	Media regulatory authority	Public service media operator	Other media institution
Albania	- National Council of Radio and Television (*Këshilli Kombëtar i Radios dhe Televizionit*, KKRT)	- Albanian Public Radio and Television (*Radio Televizioni Shqiptar,* RTS)	- Union of Albanian Journalists (*Unioni i Gazetarëve Shqiptarë,* UGSH)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	- Communications Regulatory Agency, CRA (*Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije,* RAK)	- Public Service Broadcasting System, PSB (*Javni RTV sistem*)	- Open Broadcast Network (OBN) - Press Council (*Vijeće za štampu*) - Center for Investigative Reporting (*Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo*, CIN)
Kosovo	- Independent Media Commission, IMC (*Komisioni i Pavarur i Mediave*, KPM)	- Radio Television of Kosovo, RTK (*Radiotelevizioni i Kosovës*)	- Press Council of Kosovo (*Këshilli i Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës*)
Macedonia	- Broadcasting Council (*Sovetot za radiodifuzija*)	- Macedonian Radio Television (*Македонска radiotelevizija*, MRTV)	- Macedonian Institute for Media (*Македонски институт za медиуми*, MIM)
Serbia	- Republic Broadcasting Agency, RBA (*Republička radiodifuzna agencija,* RRA)	- Public Service Broadcasting of Serbia (*Radio-televizija Srbije*, RTS)	- B92 (Private TV station) - Center for Investigative Reporting Serbia (*Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo Srbije*, CINS)

Second, a cross-national comparison is used to interpret the country case-studies against the backdrop of democratization and transition theories. Although there are inevitable differences among the five countries in terms of paths and dynamics of their media democratization and overall democratic transitions, basic contextual characteristics relevant to our study surface throughout the case studies, namely the nature of the media markets, political interference in the media sector, weak professionalization but strong instrumentalization of journalism, and lackluster implementation of media reforms, to name only few.

This allows us to focus on the two aspects of interest to our study and compare them across the five countries: the extent to which domestic media institutions are sustainable and functional in relation to the relevant international assistance programs and conditionality linked to those institutions. It also helps to appraise how the national context impacts on democratic media transformation. As media institutions in the Western Balkan region are often modelled after similar institutions in Western European democracies, the outcomes invariably differ from the prototype.

However, this research is limited by the insufficient documentation of IMA which is often lacking precise data necessary to compile a more accurate account of the benefits per institution and for each country. In fact, the estimations in Rhodes' 2007 report are still the most widely cited, despite being eight years out of date. In addition, economic indicators for local media markets are not gathered systematically and conditionality is difficult to approach empirically.

Western Balkan Countries: Common traits and differences

Although the countries of the Western Balkans share significant social, political, historical and economic traits, the region's recent trajectory has not been very coherent. Since the collapse of socialism in the 1990s, all five countries are undergoing a difficult transition to democracy and a free market economy. They have in common a post-authoritarian legacy, relatively small territories and weak economies. However, these similarities should not obscure the fact that there are important differences in political traditions, local cultures and ethnic composition of the population throughout the region.

The region's conflict-ridden history has inspired the term Balkanization, which is widely used to describe a process of geopolitical fragmentation. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia BiH and Kosovo emerged as independent states only after devastating wars and extensive military interventions that NATO undertook against Serb forces in BiH in 1995 (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 13f.), and in Kosovo and Serbia in 1999 (Miftari 2013: 8). Macedonia was also affected by a limited conflict between its two majority peoples – Macedonians and Albanians (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 8). Albania alone went through a

peaceful transition, although the country took in many war refugees, mainly from Kosovo (Londo 2013: 51).

The ethnic composition in all the countries varies to a significant degree. In Albania and Kosovo, Albanians are by far the majority people but there is a significant Serb minority in the latter (Londo 2013: 8; Miftari 2013: 8). Serbia's dominant majority are Serbs (83 percent of the population) (Marko 2013: 8). In contrast, BiH is the home of three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 14) and in Macedonia ethnic Macedonians and Albanians coexist, among others (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 8).

Today, out of these five Western Balkan countries two are in the antechamber of the European Union (EU). For some time Macedonia and, recently, Serbia have had candidate status but the pre-accession negotiations are open-ended. BiH, Kosovo and Albania are still potential candidate countries, and thus further away from their ultimate aim to accede to the EU. Striving for EU membership requires these Western Balkan countries comply with its democratic and market economy standards (the so-called 'Copenhagen Criteria'). Today EU conditionality is a major driver of reforms in the region.

Quality of democracy and media transformation

This section starts by introducing the theoretical framework on the interdependencies between media transformation and the state of democracy before discussing it in the light of the Western Balkan countries studied.

Any transformation of media institutions is contingent upon the political context and the overall state of democratic consolidation in a specific country (Hallin & Mancini 2004; Humphreys 1996; Jakubowicz 2013; Zielonka & Mancini 2011). Democratic development is a non-linear and open-ended process – in other words it is not possible to orchestrate results but only processes that may be conducive to buttressing democratic values and practices. Consolidation of democracy starts once critical institutions and procedures for democratic governance are in place. There may be situations where certain policy sub-systems and institutions develop ahead of the average pace of democratic transition but the interdependencies with other state institutions and practices can severely obstruct their ability to consolidate.

For the Western Balkan countries, the starting point has been anything but favorable because efforts towards democratic media transformation are confronted with "legacies of undemocratic structures, politicians, and traditions" (Price, Noll & de Luce 2002: 57). The environment in which local media systems operate is not enabling, notably the rule of law and tenets of good governance are ineffective albeit they are formally in place (Kumar 2009; Price & Krug 2006). As Davor

Marko (2013: 12) aptly puts it for Serbia: "It has the form (laws, institutions, procedures, party pluralism, etc.) but lacks the substance of a meaningful democratic political culture." The ethnic composition of a country's population significantly influences its political system. For BiH as well as Macedonia, this means that the mass media is also divided along linguistic and ethnic lines (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 20f.; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 16). Post-conflict situations present in BiH and Kosovo pose additional challenges because media can play a role in reconciliation but it can also work against it (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 15f.; Miftari 2013: 18).

Western Balkan countries share many if not most of the characteristics Jan Zielonka and Paolo Mancini (2011) identified in relation to other Central and Eastern European countries that have undergone democratic transitions, namely the politicization of the state, weak rational-legal authority (Weber 1958), in addition to a general implementation deficit. The politicised state connotes a situation in which political parties and other vested interests try to conquer public and state institutions in order to extract resources from them (Grzymała-Busse 2003: 1123). In short, public policy and administration are informed by the ad hoc needs of the politicians in power and the informality of rules to the detriment of formal institutions and the rule of law. A change of government inevitably turns the wheel of fortune that rewards political loyalty in the public sector and in the relationship of the state vis-à-vis the private sector.

In the five countries surveyed the nexus between political and media systems exemplify a high degree of politicization that is evidenced as follows:

- Across the region, the editorial lines of the mass media are often partisan; the national public service media operator tends to favour the government of the day (Thompson 2013: 25), whereas the political allegiances of the press and commercial television are distributed across the political spectrum.[3] In Albania, Macedonia and Serbia clientelist media is on the rise (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Londo 2013: 16; Marko 2013: 19), in BiH there is a characteristic overlapping of ethnic and political patronage in the media (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 16f.).
- Partisan media is even more pronounced during election times in Western Balkan countries, in particular in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 19; Londo 2013: 14f.; Miftari 2013: 17).
- In each of the countries covered by this research political pressure on key media institutions is commonplace, notably on the local media supervisory authority and the national public service media organization (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Londo 2013; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013; Marko 2013; Miftari 2013). An additional characteristic is the significant

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[3] Katrin Voltmer (2013) critically engages with existing high notions of media pluralism and objectivity.

post-electoral vulnerabilities when new governments in power re-politicise appointments to the boards of these bodies, e.g., in BiH, Kosovo and Serbia (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013; Marko 2013; Miftari 2013).

- Public money, which is a significant source of media revenue across the region, is often allocated in a non-transparent way and arguably follows clientelistic lines. This issue is especially the case in Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and BiH (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013; Marko 2013; Miftari 2013). The statutory independence of public service media outlets is de facto undermined by their reliance on state funding (Thompson 2013).

- Career paths of certain journalists are characterised by a revolving door between media and political affiliations and jobs, as was found in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Marko 2013; Miftari 2013). It has been established that many media owners in Kosovo and Macedonia were or are still elected politicians or *cadres* in the local partitocracy (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013; Miftari 2013).

Contrary to the theory developed in the context of Western democracies, the different political systems of the Western Balkans have not produced diverging levels of media policy stability or media institutions' independence (Hallin & Mancini 2004; Tsebelis 2002). For the local media systems it does not seem to matter whether the country's political system is majoritarian, as is the case for Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo, or polarized pluralist, as is the case for BiH and Macedonia. The two countries with strong ethnic differences grant veto-powers to their respective ethnic constituencies, in the case of BiH, as a measure to secure peace, and in the case of Macedonia in order to protect Albanian minority interests from Macedonian majority rule. The ethnic and corresponding territorial divisions are replicated in the political landscape. The politics of consensus appear to work best whenever elected politicians attempt to retain or increase their influence over the media. In Macedonia what prevails is a "pedantic distribution of spheres of influence" of Macedonian politicians over Macedonian media and of Albanian politicians over Albanian language media (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 42).

For all Western Balkan countries civil society is not a decisive factor in public policy. Yet, for each country under consideration one or even more dedicated non-governmental organizations specialise in media policy and advocacy, most of which have received funding from international donors for their work. They are crucial for claiming transparency and participating in legislative processes that concern the media and for being vigilant and vocal about interferences with media and journalistic freedoms. At the same time it becomes apparent from the country studies that many non-governmental organizations in this area discontinued or significantly limited their work often due to a lack of funding. Industry associations, however, became gradually more influential when representing

commercial media interests in media policy-making.

Media in transition

When the socialist era ceased at the end of the 1980s, the media systems of all the countries in the region had a similar point of departure. Under socialist rule, all broadcasting media was operated by the state and print media were tightly controlled, while propaganda and (self)censorship were commonplace. The transition paths that local media systems passed through, however, started to differentiate very early. It was evident that any transition was delayed in those countries that were a party to the latest series of conflicts in the Western Balkans, and during this period media in particular were instrumentalized:

- During the Milošević regime, Serbian mainstream media served government propaganda (Marko 2013: 13);
- In BiH, the media were ethnically divided and in most cases openly war-mongering (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 15); and
- In Kosovo, broadcast media in Albanian language had been banned entirely by the Serbian regime (Miftari 2013: 18).

Moreover, the legal vacuum that followed socialist rule and the violent conflicts were far from orderly liberalisation and de-regulation; rather, entry into the media market was a matter of ad hoc seizing of opportunity. For the Western Balkans most of the 1990s was chaotic because the use of the broadcasting spectrum was disorganised and the commercialisation of print and broadcast media rushed through, without a regulatory framework in place. Media in these countries initially proliferated to hundreds of press products and radio and TV stations. Subsequently regulations were issued and supervision had to assert itself before the market eventually complied with it, to a certain extent. For instance, Macedonia, Serbia and BiH eventually granted licenses to most radio and TV stations after they had started operating and this process was apparently only limited by technical constraints (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 14; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 17; Marko 2013: 16). However, little consideration was given to the strategic development of broadcast media markets.

As of the early 2000s, the transformation paths of the media systems in the five Western Balkan countries converged in what is considered the Western European (liberal) media model (Jakubowicz & Sükösd 2008: 28). The general characteristics of this model are that:

- The law distinguishes between press and broadcast media with a press that is ideally self-regulating while broadcast media is subject to extensive regulation.[4]

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[4] Pursuant to EU developments broadcast media legislation is extended to audiovisual media

- Implementation and enforcement of local broadcast media legislation is delegated to independent media supervisory authorities (Irion & Radu 2013: 15f.).
- Originating in the broadcasting sector the so-called dual media system provides for the co-existence of public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasters (Thompson 2013: 25).

With the exception of Kosovo, where the public service broadcaster was built from scratch (Miftari 2013), the national public service media operators are the product of the reform of the former state broadcasters in all the four other countries (Thompson 2013).

In the Western Balkans, democratic media transformation has involved very intense and complex reform processes. In about a decade, media systems in these countries underwent four fundamental reforms:

1. Liberalisation in addition to the introduction of new media legislation and a media supervisory authority;
2. Transformation of the state broadcaster (radio and television) to public service media organization/s;
3. Ongoing digital switch-over/ analogue switch-off of terrestrial broadcasting as well as overall digitalisation of media across all platforms; and
4. Introduction of a self-regulatory framework alongside the development of professional supporting organizations, such as associations of journalists, specialized training centers, industry associations, etc.

The cumulative needs of media reform had to be tackled all at once contributing to permanent and often turbulent changes in the media systems of these countries. The implementation of these key reforms needed supporting strategies, legislation and institutions. But media transformations in countries that are, at the same time, undergoing a fundamental democratic transition process are unlikely to receive optimal support. Typically, local constraints on democratic media transition are three-fold:

1. Media reforms stall because important media legislation and strategies are not adopted, like in the case of Kosovo where the process of amending the laws on Independent Media Commisions (IMC) and the Radio Television Kosovo (RTK) dragged on for years, leaving the boards of these institutions largely dysfunctional (Miftari 2013: 14); while
2. Pieces of existing media legislation or other norms that have an effect on the local media system are constantly put up for revision by successive governments. For example, the provisions for the election of the council of the RBA in Serbia have been changed four times in five years, between 2004

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services that are broadcast-like.

and 2009 (Marko 2013: 31) while in Albania the electronic media law has been amended seven times (Londo 2013: 17); and

3. Media policy objectives and legislation on the one hand, and implementation and practice on the other hand, are out of step to varying degrees, since the rules and policies are often selectively interpreted and applied as is the case in BiH where a legal framework for public broadcasting has only been partially implemented, effectively blocking the creation of the functional public service broadcasting system (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 35-42);

In BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia all three constraints are present, sometimes cumulatively; however, issues may arise and get compounded over the terms of successive governments. Albania is certainly not without setbacks in the process of media transition but it appears that important media reforms have been tackled, albeit slowly (Londo 2013).

It is now widely accepted that imported media institutions and standards can diverge from the ideal-type models of similar institutions originating in Western democracies and media theory. The literature advances different theses that explain these variations as a result of the local context and conditions but also of the time required for democratic development and consolidation. Karol Jakubowicz (2013) invokes "ontogenesis" as an analogy illustrating how local media institutions pass through similar stages of evolution as media institutions did elsewhere, although perhaps more compressed and with open outcomes. Other authors stress the process of social construction during which imported values blend with local practices, as a result of which "atavistic" or "hybrid" media systems emerge (Jakubowicz & Sükösd 2008; Voltmer 2012, 2013).

A look at the trends from the IREX Media Sustainability Index (MSI) below (Figure 1) reveals that compared to the point of departure in the early 2000s all countries show progress on specific key dimensions of sustainable media systems.[5] However, BiH, Macedonia and Serbia outperformed their peers in the recent past only to drop again to what is the regional average, or, in the case of Macedonia, even below it.

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[5] The IREX Media Sustainability Index groups indicators in relation to five objectives, i.e. free speech, professional journalism, plurality of news sources, business management and supporting institutions, see IREX (2011). "Media Sustainability Index (MSI) Methodology", published 14 July 2011. Available at http://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi-methodology.

Figure 1: Western Balkans: IREX MSI
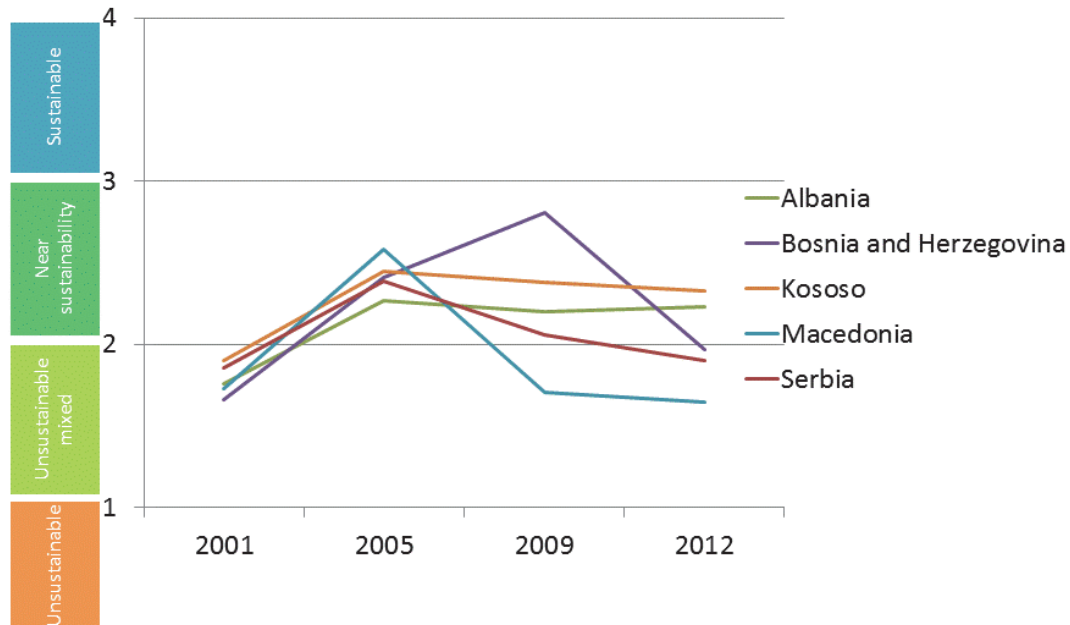
Source: IREX MSI for Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia 2001, 2005, 2009, and 2012[6]

Media economics

The democratic transformation of media systems in the Western Balkans faces comparatively difficult media economics. Local media markets are very small in terms of audiences, ranging from just below two million inhabitants in Kosovo to seven million in Serbia (Marko 2013: 8; Miftari 2013: 8; Voltmer 2013: 9). Advertising-financed media competes for very limited sources of revenue and this is further exacerbated by the high number – in relation to the size of the media market and viewership – of print, radio and television outlets. In all the countries studied some degree of oversaturation in media markets is evident that structurally exceeds its economic capacity (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 16; Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 17; Londo 2013: 9; Marko 2013: 9). The country studies explain that the subsistence of private mass media is often dependent on politics and other businesses which help financing its operations. The overall unfavourable economic conditions after the 2008 global financial crisis have led to a further decline in advertising spending which disproportionately affects the print media (e.g. Londo 2013: 13; Marko 2013: 25).

In all Western Balkan countries the public sector, including state-owned companies, is one of the most significant sources of funding for media that carry

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[6] Available at http://www.irex.org/project/media-sustainability-index-msi-europe-eurasia.

advertisements, campaigns and other public communications. This issue was specifically highlighted in our case-studies of Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 17; Marko 2013: 16; Miftari 2013: 14) but appears to be present across the region. The resulting financial dependencies are a cause of concern whenever funds are not transparently allocated and possibly directed towards government-friendly media. Moreover, direct subsidies by the state to media outlets are quite common, for example in BiH and through local government in Serbia (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 16; Marko 2013: 16). This is regardless of the financing from public sources of the public service media in these countries, which in addition compete for advertising revenues with commercial media outlets.

Western Balkan media markets are highly susceptible to "business parallelism", which refers to the residual overlapping of "economics, politics and the media" in post-socialist countries (Zilonka & Mancini 2011). Where there is no business in media, media become the business because they amplify interests other than the public interest. Especially in highly polarized and politically fragmented contexts, media outlets that compete for rather limited resources can alternatively extract their revenue from political patronage and clientelism (Johnson 2012; Zilonka & Mancini 2011). In all countries covered, fuzzy ownership issues are present where owners, financial stakes and political affiliations are not transparent. Compared to direct political influence, however, the issues of ownership and cross-subsidization are more subtle means to influence the editorial line of media outlets beyond the reach of constitutional and legal safeguards of media independence.

With a few exceptions, foreign media investors are not very prominent in Western Balkan countries. However, the international community did finance a fair number of media operations during the early 1990s in Serbia as well as in post-conflict BiH and Kosovo. The only notable development is the entry of Al Jazeera Balkans, which began broadcasting in local languages in late 2011.

International media assistance

The Western Balkans have been beneficiaries of IMA programs to varying degrees. Because of the intensity of media reforms and institution building, BiH and Kosovo are the two post-conflict countries that have been qualified as international media interventions (Thompson & De Luce 2002). IMA programs did also target Albania, Macedonia and Serbia but to a lesser degree. Even within this group, there are significant differences in the scope and the nature of media assistance, with much more extensive support to Serbia compared to fairly moderate assistance programs in Albania (Rhodes 2007; see Table 2).

Table 2: Media Assistance in Western Balkans 1996-2006 (in million Euro)

	Training	Direct Support	Media Environment	Total Euro
Albania	6.9	1.8	1.9	10.6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	17.4	42.0	27.7	87.1
Croatia	2.4	19.7	14.5	36.6
Macedonia	3.4	9.2	11.2	23.8
Montenegro	1.3	2.9	3.4	7.6
Serbia	5.4	26.4	13.1	44.9
Kosovo	6.1	45.6	6.9	58.6
Balkans	*42.9*	*147.6*	*78.7*	*269.2*

Source: Rhodes 2007.

Between the early 1990s and today, when comparing the five country case-studies, IMA to Western Balkan countries can be classified in three phases, which show some overlap:

Phase 1: Supporting independent media (throughout the 1990s and early 2000s) with the aim of overcoming information monopolies, such as in Serbia during the Milosevic regime, and to contribute to reconciliation after the conflict in BiH and Kosovo.

Phase 2: Media reforms and institution building (1998 until 2005) throughout the Western Balkans, with different degrees of intensity, focusing on the provision of assistance in the context of media legislation, the introduction of a media supervisory body and the transition from state to public service broadcaster, in addition to support for self-regulatory bodies, advocacy organizations and industry associations in the media.

Phase 3: Phasing out of international media assistance (2005 until today) is characterised by a significant IMA roll-back across the region, often relying on EU accession procedures as the new engine for democratic media transition. This goes hand-in-hand with the ultimate handover of ownership of and responsibility for media institutions to local stakeholders – a process of domestication. In Kosovo and Macedonia, scaled back media assistance focuses almost exclusively on support to minority media.

From today's vantage point, when assessing the media assistance programs, the results are varied, both among countries and among different media sub-systems within all of the countries studied. Some of the internationally backed efforts produced fairly sustainable media institutions, while others ended in failure or are – to say the least – vulnerable to systemic and business parallelism. Yet other projects and programs witnessed initial progress followed by later stagnation or even return to earlier authoritarian practices and norms.

International actors

Building on the country case-studies international actors can be broadly distinguished by their respective functions and put into three groups: in the first group are organizations that influence local media policy and institution building primarily based on their political and financial leverage; the second group consists of primary donors of media reforms; while the third group is made up of implementing organizations that provide operational support targeting media in the Western Balkanes. This does not preclude some actors being active on all levels.

From the first group, the most prominent international actors are those equipped with an international mandate such as the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in BiH and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) or have significant political and/or financial leverage, such as the U.S., EU, OSCE, UN, and Council of Europe, to name only few. Their relationships were more closely-knit, including delegating specific media mandates to the OSCE in BiH and Kosovo (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 18f.; Miftari 2013: 18f.). Nonetheless, even among the top-tier organizations approaches differed considerably, reflecting different values and priorities (Miftari 2013: 18f.).

The second group of international actors identified in the country case-studies are much more diverse, comprising of other countries and their development and cooperation programs, such as Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC), USAID, UK's DfID, or Swedish SIDA which provided the bulk of funds for media development. These donors were closely followed by some private donors, such as Open Society Foundations, for example.

The third group consists of development and non-governmental organizations as well as a plethora of implementing agencies, such as IREX, Internews, BBC, Press Now, and others, which were directly involved in disbursing donor funds and managing large-scale media development programs and projects. Their contributions have been significant but disparate, lacking overarching strategies and coordination.

Goals and approaches of international media assistance

According to Rhodes (2007) there are two main and interrelated categories of goals and objectives of media support in the Western Balkanes: on one level, there are political and social goals, on the other there are media-specific objectives. These two levels were intrinsically linked: political and social goals by definition created the demand for media-specific objectives, while media-specific objectives worked towards achieving political and social goals (Ibid.).

The approach to media assistance was based on several core assumptions about the roles and the values associated with the function of the media in a democratic

system according to the idealized model of a "developed Western democracy" (Voltmer 2013: 9). Hence, the media assistance efforts were aimed at developing "professional" and "objective" journalists and "independent" and "impartial" media outlets (Johnson 2012: 3, 42f.), that would be financially sustainable and would offer a "plurality" of different views when covering political issues and current events. However, the differences between the socio-cultural and political contexts of Western Balkan countries compared to those in Western democracies manifest as contingencies in local media institutions and practices that differ in many respects from the Western-democratic models (Johnson 2012: 92; Voltmer 2013: 11f.).

This should not be interpreted to suggest that IMA promoted the wrong values of media in the Western Balkans. In these countries, the constitutional protection of freedom of expression and media freedoms is necessary to counter state encroachments on such rights. Local media policy and legislation that corresponds to European best practices has been instrumental in opening up media markets, combating hate speech, decriminalizing defamation and introducing elementary journalistic privileges, such as source protection (Rhodes 2007). Where they exist, high formal standards laid the foundations for professional and plural media.

Absence of Coordination

The IMA literature stresses that donor coordination is a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of the whole media sector (Price, Noll & de Luce 2002: 53; Rhodes 2007: 22). Especially when many diverse organizations and programmes operate in parallel, effective donor coordination is key to creating synergies, to dividing labour corresponding to the capacities and to preventing duplication (Rhodes 2007: 22). In some Western Balkan countries, there were attempts to improve the transparency and coordination of IMA:

- In 2005, the Albanian Government created the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination, which inter alia also gathered data on IMA (Londo 2013: 21).
- In BiH, during the early period of media assistance efforts, the OHR convened regular bi-weekly roundtables with all major donors and maintained a database of donor projects (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 20f.).
- The most intense phase of IMA in Kosovo saw donor coordination at the policy level but at the operational level coordination was barely perceptible (Mfitari 2013: 25).

The impact of these endeavours was, however, very limited, not least because donor organizations took decisions before making efforts at transparency and coordination. Many parallel efforts testify to a symptomatic absence of meaningful coordination mechanisms during the crucial phase of media reforms and institution building in the Western Balkans. More frequently, implicit coordination

occurred when an international actor launched an initiative which factually demarcated its lead on the issue. Issue based coordination occurred for example during the early support of the independent media network, ANEM, in Serbia (Marko 2013: 47) and as a by-product of the involvement of the same international organizations in the construction of the independent media supervisory authority, KKRT, in Albania (Londo 2013: 33). What is of concern are accounts of donor competition in BiH and Kosovo (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 20; Martin 2011: 90) such as the fact that donors supported three concurrent radio networks linking minority communities in Kosovo (Miftari 2013: 25).

Conditionality mechanisms

In international development and democratization, conditionality describes a mechanism by which states implement measures of their own accord in order to conform with international obligations or standards that are prerequisite for membership of international organizations and in order to qualify for international aid. Contrary to measures being imposed externally, conditionality holds the advantage that legislation is passed by local authorities, which would seem to guarantee local ownership and deliberation from the outset. As a practice of IMA, conditionality is an important driver to instigate media reforms in the countries of the Western Balkans in order to accede to the Council of Europe and ultimately the EU. The leverage of the stabilization and association process that governs EU relations with Western Balkan countries has been outstanding.[7]

In this context, the five Western Balkan countries under study have to fulfil a range of media specific commitments in their pursuit of freedom of expression and to bring the countries' legislation in line with the EU *acquis*. This entails issuing an EU compliant legal framework for the media sector and constituting legislation for key media institutions, i.e. the national media supervisory authority and the public service media organization. As a democratic quality, media and regulatory independence has to be assured and protected. Notwithstanding its success in transposing European values and EU compliant normative frameworks in the countries of the Western Balkans, EU conditionality has had limited effect on their implementation and on converging formal arrangements with local practices. The annual progress reports highlight fairly concordant issues with the independence of the local media supervisory authority and the public service broadcaster. For instance, it was noted for Albania that: "conditionality mechanisms have so far failed to ensure absence of political and financial pressures on the key media institutions" (Londo 2013).

Another caveat is that EU conditionality is most prescriptive when it comes to the transposition of the EU *acquis*, i.e. media specific legislation by the EU. Yet the

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[7] For Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo which are governed under international protectorate the role of the EU has increased proportionately with the diminishing role of the OHR and UNMIK, respectively.

competences of the EU in the media sphere are heavily curtailed and consequently EU media legislation primarily focuses on the freedom to provide services within the internal market. The central piece of EU media legislation, the 2008 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (European Parliament and the Council 2010), addresses issues of media convergence that may be more pressing in the old member states but less meaningful and rather distracting for Western Balkan accession and candidate countries. The EU *aquis* is mute when it comes to the organization of public service broadcasting, i.e. a prerogative of the member states, and remains superficial at best regarding the independence of media supervisory authorities. As a result, EU conditionality in the media sector often does not set the right priorities for local media systems where elementary democratic principles, such as transparency and independence, are necessary.

Grappling with local media economics

Local media economics, which are described above as particularly challenging, turned out to severely affect the efforts invested into the democratic transformation of Western Balkan local media systems. For a variety of reasons IMA to the Western Balkan countries failed to reduce the overreliance of local media on (potentially compromising) subsidies and more broadly to adequately address the economic sustainability of media outlets in print and broadcasting, as well as self-regulatory bodies and supporting institutions.

The first and most obvious reason for this is an initial total disregard for the fact that in many situations local media markets are too weak to sustain conventional media business models that rely on selling advertising and/or subscriptions in order to gain a foothold. Economic sustainability is too often simply implied or business models do not correspond to market realities and - even where this was considered – the overall deteriorating economic situation endangered what had, earlier, been viable media businesses (Rhodes 2007: 26; Sorge 2012: 42f.; Johnson 2012: 288). While building capacity in media management and diversification of business models was added at a later stage to the menus of professional trainings this could not reverse the overall downward business trend.

Second, liberalization of local media markets featured high on the agendas for IMA and was reinforced by a very liberal interpretation of market access as a tenet of exercising freedom of expression. This has arguably augmented oversaturation of local media markets because structural measures did not find favor with the international community (Sorge 2012: 36). Instead there has been a false reliance on the cleansing effect of market forces, which was thought to lead to consolidation and competition on the merits of journalistic quality and innovation (Von Franqué 2012: 92). The overall confused funding practice during IMA has further contributed to the congestion of local media markets, such as in Kosovo (Miftari 2013: 50).

This leads to the third and last issue – that the international financing of media operations is an additional source of revenue that can become the objective for local media. Development literature recognises that aid can function in a similar way to a market and can provoke artificial demands from beneficiaries locally. Without attempting to devalue the objectives of IMA, in BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia during its peak, too many local media outlets could access funding for their operational activities from a large diversity of international donors, only to collapse again when the funding dried up.[8] This finding extends to the numerous supporting institutions that were intended as media self-regulatory bodies and professional associations, and even to some extent as media watchdogs. Short-cutting the time horizon needed for proper institution building, the IMA in the Western Balkans was characterized by numerous premature exits by donors.

Local contextualisation and deliberation

The viability of international efforts invested in building democratic institutions in transitional settings are contingent upon local acceptance and the fit of imported models. The actual process of introducing institutions matters over their content and formal provisions (Berkowitz, Pistor & Richard 2003: 163). IMA in the Western Balkans was conscious of the principal need to work closely with local stakeholders and to align media reforms with the local context. Such was the case in Albania where the 1998 Law on Public and Private Radio and Television was drafted by a parliamentary commission in collaboration with a local expert group and the help of international expertise (Londo 2013: 27f.). The Macedonian Broadcasting Law from 1997 is also cited "as an exemplary form of cooperation between international bodies [and donors] and the Macedonian authorities" (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 27).

Yet, in many situations the very purpose of the deliberation, i.e. customizing legislation to the socio-political and cultural context as well as raising local acceptance, was not fully achieved, though for very different reasons:

- European media values and institutions pervaded local stakeholders' deliberations and little consideration was given to their meaningful interpretation or to measures that would compensate for a lack of tradition that would, for example, sustain formally independent media institutions.
- Occasionally, international consultants dominated deliberations providing expertise which did not correspond to local circumstances, interests or organizational cultures, as evidenced by the much criticised study of the EU on the Serbian media (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 36; Marko 2013: 25f.).
- While international expertise was invited in some situations local governments did not properly consult draft laws or, when they did so, neglected consultation outcomes leaving local stakeholders no venue to

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[8] Illustrative is the OBN case study (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 43f.), however there are some notable exceptions, see the case study on radio and TV B92 in Serbia (Marko 2013: 42f.).

influence the policy making process, e.g. in Serbia with regard to the Public Information Law (Marko 2013: 15), as well as in BiH where local expertise was, in quite a few cases, not invited (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 29).

- Every so often, well intentioned initiatives to construct media supporting institutions, such as professional organizations and self-regulatory bodies, were welcomed by local stakeholders who failed to support them in practice.
- Probably a reflection of the rather weak role of civil society, media as a public interest goal did not effectively permeate the concerns of society at large; this is well illustrated by the rather impassive relationship between the societies of the Western Balkans and their public service media (Thompson 2013: 26).

Entirely different was the situation in post-conflict BiH and Kosovo where the OHR and UNMIK used their powers to institute media legislation and institutions at a time when these states were still under construction, and later due to legislative stalemate by local governments. While some of the media institutions that were created functioned reasonably well under the international protectorate, such as the independent supervisory authority CRA in BiH, local politics were – and still remain – a real and lingering threat. Moreover, the establishment of a system of public service broadcasting in BiH is a story of local resistance that was overruled by a series of OHR decisions, and so important elements of the system remain ineffective to this day (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 36f.).

Minority media and the inter-ethnic mediated public sphere

In multi-ethnic countries like BiH, Kosovo and Macedonia international donors have been supporting underrepresented people and minorities in the media by launching media outlets, such as print publications, local radio and sometimes TV programmes, in local languages and for minority constituencies. Determining the appropriate strategy to promote minority media while preserving an integrated local media sphere appears to be particularly challenging. For example, in Macedonia the media sphere is ethnically divided, posing the threat of ethnically biased reporting and polarisation (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 21f.). Moreover, in public service media international assistance did not discourage ethnically motivated divisions and spheres of influence, frustrating later efforts to foster an inter-ethnic national identity and dialogue mediated by an integrated media sphere, e.g., in BiH and Macedonia (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 36f.; Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 42).

International monitoring

In addition to local efforts, IMA has an important role to play in monitoring the state of democratic media transformation and media institution building in the countries of the Western Balkans. From the outset there was no shortage of international monitoring tackling the media sector or specific media institutions.

Albeit with different foci, regular reports are produced by the European Commission, IREX, Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House. Other international actors engage in ad hoc monitoring, especially the Council of Europe and the OSCE, among others.

Probably the most influential, the European Commission's annual progress reports cover the media as an aspect of guaranteeing freedom of expression and media institutions within the policy on the "information society and the media". Due to its limited scope, the report has to be very concise on these issues and it does not amount to detailed monitoring. The annual progress reports for Serbia offer an illustrative example of the general nature of this exercise (Marko 2013: 34). For Macedonia it is noted that criticism from the EU attracts the widest public attention, but repeated concerns in the progress reports have not been sufficient to bring about change (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 49).

In substance, international monitoring too often questions formal arrangements but pays too little attention to the implementation of media reforms and the informal practices that are equally decisive for the functioning of media institutions. In spite of the prevailing diplomacy there must be clues as to who is accountable, what concrete action is required to improve a situation, and who is responsible for taking action. International monitoring is not an end in itself and requires diplomatic follow-up and, when necessary, political pressure. A good example is the international scrutiny over attempts to interfere with the independence of the media supervisory authority, CRA, in BiH (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 35). Now that international pressure has weakened, the CRA is facing many attempts at political capture (Ibid.). In other Western Balkan countries IMA has not used its political leverage systematically in an effort to protect key media institutions from political interference.

Achievements and pitfalls of media democratization

The following cross-national comparison of the achievements and pitfalls of democratic media transition in the five Western Balkan countries is used to examine the role and influence of IMA and conditionality.

Media freedoms and European best practices

Across all five countries there is a high level of formal compliance with local media laws and institutions with European best practices issued by the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the EU that can be attributed to their involvement during the legislative process. For the two countries that underwent media interventions, i.e. BiH and the Kososvo, the international protectorate charged the OSCE directly with drafting or even instituting local media laws. But the international community also provided expertise, consultation and evaluations of draft media

laws in Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia. For example, in many respects the new governing legislation for the independent media supervisory authorities in these countries now outshines those of old EU member states.

Such media policy transfer would be a very impressive result of IMA in the Western Balkan region were these laws effectively implemented and complied with. However, with only a handful of exceptions, the country studies reveal that there is a general mismatch between the quality of the legislation and its practical consequences, which is explained by a general implementation deficit that in some cases results from deliberate obstruction by local elites (Rhodes 2007: 29). Nonetheless, there are achievements that ought to be recognised, in particular that countries of the Western Balkans now have a pluralistic media landscape, broadcast licensing has confined the previous chaos to history, regulation effectively condemns hate speech, and the media and journalists are no longer criminalised for alleged defamation (Londo 2013: 28; Rhodes 2007: 28f.).

Beyond the progress noted it is symptomatic for a transition context that formal arrangements outperform their local context. Davor Marko (2013: 50) notes for Serbia that the transposition of European standards for the media can "set the path for the Serbian media transition". While it is not wrong to emphasize the development path, it is not enough to rely on media institutions that have democratic potential encoded in their institutional design (Jakubowicz & Sükösd 2008: 12). A normative framework alone cannot entrench good practice in the face of capture and informality, in particular the worrying tendency in Western Balkan countries for media, politics and business to form an iron triangle, i.e. a self-enforcing power structure serving local, albeit sometimes competing, elites.

Top-down versus bottom-up

When comparing the experiences across all five Western Balkan countries, it emerges that top-down legal reforms are easier to accomplish than bottom-up initiatives on the face of it.

Typical examples for top-down media institutions are the establishment of a media supervisory authority or issuing media legislation, but with mixed results in practice (see below). These findings are amplified whenever media reforms take place in the presence of international custody such as in BiH or in Kosovo. In both countries, initial media reforms were fast-tracked or were issued entirely under international authority, for example the media decrees issued by the OHR in BiH.[9] With domestication and local ownership the initial headway levels out compared to those countries which experienced more domestically driven changes in the media system, such as Macedonia, Albania and Serbia.

The building of media institutions from the bottom-up, which requires local

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[9] See for a complete list: Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 39.

acceptance, as is the case with membership-based organisations, is much more time-consuming and the prospects are uncertain. Attempts to root press and journalistic self-regulation in the countries of the Western Balkans have led to the creation of institutional empty shells:

- For Albania, the introduction of member-based organisations in the media has been by and large unsuccessful (Londo 2013: 54).
- In Macedonia, press outlets and groups of journalists do not subscribe to the authority of the Council of Honour that was charged with defending media ethics (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 23).
- In Kosovo, the OSCE attempt to set-up a journalists association in 2000 failed, while subsequent self-regulatory bodies never became self-sustaining (Miftari 2013: 48).
- Despite the 2006 Code of Ethics and the Press Council, institutionalized self-regulation remains weak in Serbia (Marko 2013: 17).

Since under the liberal media model the press especially should be self-regulating this poses a Catch 22 situation between local capacity and imported best practices. The transformation of state broadcasters to public service broadcasting and media organisations bears characteristics of both because their inception is based on a top-down legal reform but their success nevertheless rests on acceptance by the local population as well as stakeholders. Without exception public service media organisations are perceived as government friendly media and newly elected governments rush to institute their influence over the management and the content of these institutions. Moreover, as examples in Macedonia show, local constituencies do not easily accept the licence fee as a way of funding their public service broadcasting (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 43; Thompson 2013: 14, 16, 22).

Implementation and domestication: (re)politicization of media institutions

Across the region, it emerges that in addition to the sizeable implementation deficit and the culture of informality eroding democratic institutions there is a rather open tendency to (re)politicize public media institutions. These issues are mutually reinforcing and pose a very serious threat to democratic media transition and media institution building in the Western Balkan countries. At the time when IMA was being phased out, local and international observers recognised a growing political saliency of media, policy and regulation. "As soon as foreign donors withdrew their (financial and practical) support the newly implemented institutions dwindle or are being hijacked by particularistic interests" (Voltmer 2013: 14). After 2010, international reports documented the dramatic deterioration in the Macedonian media sphere, which even led to the re-intensifying of IMA (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 30).

The trade-offs between local ownership and democratic media transition are most visible in public service media reforms and with national media supervisory authorities, both raising critical issues in relation to the actual independence of the organizations. In Albania, BiH and Kosovo years can pass without elected politicians making effective appointments because such decisions are highly politicised. Public service media's dependency on the state budget, as in Serbia and Kosovo, can equally be used to leverage political influence. Likewise, these media institutions are exposed to post-electoral vulnerabilities when every new government in power attempts to change their constituting legislation.

In BiH and Kosovo initial progress during international media intervention has been partially off-set during the subsequent process of domestication, i.e. when ownership, control and oversight over local media institutions was handed-back to local stakeholders. In Kosovo, "the issue of political interference in media institutions has intensified following 'Kosovarization'" (Miftari 2013). In BiH, the government increasingly ignores international criticisms over the independence of the regulatory authority CRA (Jusić & Ahmetašević 2013: 34f.).

By contrast, business parallelism is nurtured by local media economics and the lack of transparency, and above all is perfectly legal. In private media where owners and editors – albeit constrained economically – are free to define their editorial line, political allegiances and partisan reporting have increased.

Non-transparent media

IMA failed to promote transparency in crucial aspects of media governance which could have guided media policy. Throughout the democratic media transition in the Western Balkans there has been no systematic effort to gather and release economic indicators about local media markets that could expose the rampant cross-subsidization to media outlets. More direct transparency concerning media ownership and funding would be crucial to tackle fuzzy ownership which is more complex than understanding who owns which media. In reference to Albania, Ilda Londo concludes that media owners and moguls are "persons with economic interests in other businesses, lacking media experience and with little transparency of their media funding practices" (Londo 2013: 16). Attempts to introduce transparency of media ownership in Serbia, for example, were met with fierce resistance by private media. The same applies to transfers of the state and of state-owned companies to any media outlet, no matter whether this is in exchange for media services or by way of public subsidies. The reason for this blind spot is easy to pinpoint: neither the *acquis* of the Council of Europe nor the European Union provides for the introduction of such far-reaching transparency and procedural requirements.[10]

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[10] So far, at the European and EU level there are only non-binding instruments, specifically Para. 8.18-19 of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1636 (2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly on Indicators for media in a democracy, Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 October 2008, Available at

Internal culture of independence through good governance practices

Through an internal culture of independence the resilience of media organizations in the public and the private sector could to a certain extent be strengthened, even in an environment that is not fully enabling, as is the case in the Western Balkans (Council of Europe 2008). Especially in the public sector, a public service culture that embraces the tenets of good governance, i.e. transparency of decision-making, participatory deliberations and accountability, is believed to improve the overall performance and public standing of key media institutions. Unfortunately, European best practices that are binding in the media sector do not tie in with good governance practices. IMA flagged the role of transparency and accountability only selectively, which has promoted some change, e.g. by infusing more transparency in the work of the Macedonian media supervisory authority (Dimitrijevska-Markoski & Daskalovski 2013: 36). Another successful element is the integration of local media supervisory authorities into European networks of peer institutions, e.g. the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA).

Conclusions

The effects of IMA accompanying the democratic transformation of the media in the Western Balkans are highly constrained by the local context. IMA solutions have not been sufficiently cognitive of all aspects of local conditions; for example, neglecting media economics in these very small markets, and also in regard to the ability of media supporting institutions to govern themselves. International responses to the political saliency of media policy have been rather schematic when prescribing independent institutions as regulators and in public service media. The promoted media reforms did not harness much needed transparency in media markets and governance, have lacked strategic approaches to promote media policy stability and have failed to keep close tabs on credible media reform and implementation.

In the Western Balkan countries studied, the transformation of the media systems and their subsystems has not been linear; all transformation cases studied have experienced retrograde processes and back-sliding after the external push for change weakened. Today, democratic media transition in these countries is comparatively stagnant and in some the situation may deteriorate further, e.g., Macedonia. We conclude that a decade of IMA of varying intensity was not

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http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta08/eres1636.htm; Cf. Council of Europe's 1994 Committee of Ministers Recommendation 94(13) on Measures to Promote Media Transparency at
http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/cm/rec(1994)013&expmem_EN.asp;
European Parliament resolution of 25 September 2008 on concentration and pluralism in the media in the European Union, document P6TA(2008)0459, at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0459&language=EN.

sufficient to construct media institutions when, in order to function properly, they have to outperform their local context.

In addition, our cross-national comparison of key media institutions in the Western Balkan countries suggests that – aside from short term effects – scaling IMA does not necessarily improve outcomes. Those media systems and key institutions that received a stronger push through external assistance or even direct intervention were able to 'travel' faster and further than those that were primarily driven by domestic reforms. However, the institutions that were constructed more radically and rapidly due to external assistance witnessed a fiercer backlash once they were integrated into the local legal and institutional context, after the external assistance was reduced.

In the mid-term, the media institutions and policies introduced will largely depend on the development of the political culture in the five studied countries – an uncertain and slow process of systemic change (Jakubowicz & Sükösd 2008: 12f.). However, it would be too early to conclude that in the Western Balkans these alarming trends have already solidified into hybrid or "atavistic" media systems in which the imported European media models are irreversibly tweaked by political parallelism.While the present state of affairs is locally driven, IMA will be needed for the foreseeable future to counterbalance politicization and partisanship in the media. IMA should accept the political nature of media policy when formulating responses that are sensitive to local interests and create positive incentives that will ensure political support locally.

To a certain extent, the loss of IMA effectiveness is also self-inflicted due to a number of shortcomings, most importantly the lack of coordination among donors and the absence of an adequate long-term strategy of institution-building. Scattered international competences and the self-referentiality of the international system have played a part in undermining a consistent and coherent approach that could have been reinforcing at the normative and implementation levels. The EU conditionality mechanisms are still a very strong incentive for Western Balkan regimes to continue media reforms and institution building, however, implementation is not properly enforced. Thus, while at the formal level the introduction of European best practices and key media institutions has apparently succeeded, there is a growing sense of urgency to improve implementation and effectiveness before the locally specific mismatch between form and substance consolidates into atavistic media systems.

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Kristina Irion *is presently a Marie Curie fellow at the Institute for Information Law (IViR) at the University of Amsterdam where she will be implementing a research project on governing digital information. She is faculty (on research leave) at the Departments of Public Policy and Legal Studies at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. She obtained her Dr. iuris degree from Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, and holds a Master's degree in Information Technology and Telecommunications Law from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. She has worked in the field of audiovisual media, electronic communications and data protection regulation and policy for ten years as an academic and professional. Kristina Irion was key personnel of four collaborative European research projects on privacy, independent media regulatory bodies, and building functioning media institutions. She provided expertise to the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the OECD and ENISA as well as collaborating with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). She is a member of the international advisory boards of the Electronic Information Privacy Center (EPIC) and Privacy Int'l.*
Email: k.irion@uva.nl

Tarik Jusić*, Executive Director and Head of the Public Communication Program at the Center for Social Research Analitika. Tarik holds a doctoral degree from the Institute for Media and Communication Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, and an MA degree in Political Science from Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. He has worked as Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Sarajevo School of Science and Technology from 2009 until 2013. He was also a guest lecturer at the European Regional Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democracy in South East Europe (ERMA) of the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies at the University of Sarajevo from 2009 until 2012. He has worked as a researcher, program director and program adviser at Mediacentar Sarajevo from July 2002 until November 2011. From 2006 until 2010, he was also an editor of the online magazine "Puls demokratije". He has published a number of academic and professional papers and has edited several books dealing with the development of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region of Southeast Europe.*
Email: tarik.jusic@analitika.ba