

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS FORUM, CAUX,
SWITZERLAND
15-20 JULY 1997

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THE POST COMMUNIST CHALLENGE TO EUROPE

Voices of hope from a more-free media

In centrally-governed countries whether communist, fascist, nationalist or military the struggle for a free media is intense and courageous. Where freedom prevails, there is a strong drive to exploit the media for ambitious and greedy ends.

Where media professionals are government-servers or self-servers, the public loses confidence in them. If we are to combat these influences, media professionals need to find vision and strategy.

This was the purpose of a forum at Caux, Switzerland, which brought together 40 media people, particularly from East, Central and South-East Europe, to seek out 'the media's role in renewal and reconstruction'. Journalists came from Belgrade, Zagreb, Warsaw, Krakow and Sofia, searching for means to counter the nationalism which has proved so destructive in their region. Some of them are giving up safe careers and secure incomes to establish and maintain free newspapers, radio stations and news agencies in their cities. There had been a decline in professional standards, both in Western and post-Communist countries, said Bernard Margueritte, veteran foreign correspondent for the French media in Warsaw. This was a matter for the



William Porter
ICF Chairman

consciences of all employed in the media; that is why he is active in the work of the ICF. Graham Turner, a leading British investigative journalist, said he is active because of the importance he places on a vigilant media in the democratic process. 'It is essential,' he said, 'and we need to thank God that there are courageous journalists who go out and do this difficult job.'



Graham Turner
British national
newspaper journalist

Paul-Emile Dentan, United Nations correspondent for the Swiss media, briefed the participants on the story which has pushed Switzerland into the world's headlines in recent months the disclosure that Swiss banks still retain large amounts of money deposited before and during World War II by Jews who died in the Holocaust. The banks had been wrong, Dentan said, and reparation was needed. Media publicity had played a part in persuading the banks to set up a fund of 264 million Swiss francs. A special commission has been appointed to investigate Swiss actions during the war and, if necessary, rewrite history text books. But the media had not covered itself in glory, he said, giving examples of foreign reports of the story which were highly inaccurate and pervaded by hostility.

The Forum programme included a talk by Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, on 'The Morality of Globalisation'. 'The world desperately needs leaders whose moral values leave an imprint on every decision they make, leaders whose own morality gives them strength to turn the tide of self-interest that seems to be driving the process of globalisation,' he said. His wide-ranging talk concluded: 'I am confident that not even the colossal forces of globalisation are a match for the collective power of individuals to defend social values and justice. That power, that strength, is in the heart and hand of every decent person we meet. Let's use it, let's change the world.'



An exhilarating musical contribution was made by the Glinka Sextet from Moscow. With them is Victor Ryabchikov, concert pianist and Vladimir Shaklein, art critic and organiser of the Glinka Festival.

Messages of support to the Forum came from the Community of Hungarian Journalists; from Stefan Wilkanowicz, President of the Znak Foundation of Krakow; Ramzi Lani, Executive Director of the Albanian Media Institute, and others. Thanks are due to the Soros Open Society centres who helped with travel and accommodation costs and to some individuals who made generous contributions. ■

JOURNALISM UNDER QUESTION

Learning from a younger generation

Jan Pieklo is a National Council member of the Association of Polish Journalists. He reported the Bosnian conflict for the Polish media, and has written a book detailing media trends in reporting that conflict trends which, he believes, made a tragic situation worse.

At the first session he addressed the theme "A True Understanding of the Present as created by the Past":

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, journalists faced new problems how to report the changes, how to describe the newly emerging global order (or disorder), how to make this understandable to their audience.



Jan Pieklo

At that time, West European journalists were exploring Central and East Europe, searching for news; while their colleagues from the post-Communist bloc were busy constructing their new, censorship-free media system. Prospects looked good. We all thought that, after the collapse of Communism, Europe would become integrated.

Soon, we realised that this was not happening. New conflicts broke out in the Balkans and in the Confederation of Independent States (or former Soviet Union?). Old conflicts shook the West in Northern Ireland, Corsica and Cyprus. Instead of reporting on the positive changes we expected from our 'Mother Europe', we journalists were sending reports from a besieged Sarajevo or from the ruins of Grosny. Journalists from West and East alike followed the adage, 'Good news is not news.'

Did we miss a great chance to help people understand the challenges facing us after the Wall came down, and so help change our world?

Some time ago I conducted a workshop for European students at a Youth Convention. I was asked to talk about the role of the media in European integration.

We began by working out our definition of Europe. The Russians told us that they felt threatened by the idea of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joining the European Union. A young Estonian journalist felt threatened by 'Russian imperialism'. Nobody was happy with my question, 'Is Chechnya part of Europe?' Romanians complained that the foreign media pictured them as 'dirty gypsies'. All complained that they needed to apply for a visa to enter Western Europe. Others were afraid that European integration would endanger their national identity and cultural values. In the end we politely agreed that a united Europe was still far away.

These students taught me about the role of journalists. All our interviewing techniques and the tricks that we are so proud of are useless when faced with the almost unbearable task of helping people to understand the complexity of the world we live in, and promoting moral and cultural values which can protect us from destruction. We journalist should search not only for the facts, but also for solutions to the problems that Europe and the world face. We need to give people a vision of a better future. If we have no such belief, we should quit journalism. ■

A WARNING FROM SARAJEVO

Senad Kamenica, head of news broadcasting for Bosnian Radio and Television, was prevented from attending the Forum by urgent news which broke as he was about to leave Bosnia. His prepared speech was received by the Forum. We reproduce some extracts:

Many journalists from all over the world not only those of us from Bosnia Hercegovina fear that, in the global information economy now under construction, public service television will be wholly absorbed into the mainstream of national and international corporate cultures, to the detriment of professional standards in programming and in the quality of information.

This can only be avoided if we regard information as having cultural significance; it cannot be treated as just another commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder.

Among society's essential needs from the media are:

- that we provide universal access in the home to the information services needed for full participation in democratic life.
- that we establish a regime of competition between networks which will bring as wide a distribution as possible of multi-media services.
- that standards be established to ensure that the rights of authors are protected, that ethical and professional content is preserved, and that citizens have confidence in the quality and integrity of the information available to them.■

THE COST OF PEACE AND FREEDOM

The independent media in the Balkans

Some scientists argue that women are ahead of men in the evolutionary stakes. The contribution of women to the Forum discussions could add weight to this view. Several cited courageous actions taken to maintain their editorial independence.

From Zagreb came Vesna Jankovic, Editor-in-Chief of ARKSIN, an independent magazine. The media in Croatia, she said, can be categorised into three groups. 'The first consists of State-owned or State-controlled media, which just transmit the views of the leading party. One of their main roles in the past was to project a bad image of the enemy first the Serbs, later the Bosnians or the Moslems, and recently the sport of producing internal enemies has become popular.

'A second group is the privately-owned, profit-orientated newspapers and magazines. They are mostly weeklies, and are the most successful on the market. They focus on scandal. And in the last five or six years they have been developing nationalism, even more than the State media.

'The third group is the media supported by Soros and similar foundations. They include a political weekly, a daily, and several magazines including ARKSIN. They are all facing financial troubles.

'How do we survive in the market place? Shall we commercialise? Shall we include scandal to sell more copies? How do we keep to a true line?'



**Top left to right: Lilla Danielecka, Poland, Vesna Jankovic, Croatia.
Bottom left to right: Joanna Pruszinska, Poland, Vera Sinnreich, Serbia, Natasha Pejic, Serbia, Eva Novak-Hempel, Poland.**

Roumiana Ougarchinska, Paris correspondent of STANDART, the Sofia daily, gave her view. 'East Europeans are like children who have not had sweets or chocolate for a long time,' she said. 'Suddenly they can have them. We think that they want a negative kind of reporting. But if we didn't carry these stories, would people buy other papers? They might. More testing needs to be done. But we cannot look on our papers as just a product to sell. We need to see them as a means of educating and helping our citizens.'

Vera Sinnreich, an administrator of the Serbian review REPUBLICA surveyed the cultural attitudes in the former Yugoslavia and in the separate states of today. 'The people of our region are horribly egocentric. That is more true of Serbia, where I come from. We have little translation, and pay little attention to what is happening in the rest of the world. In the media, in publishing and in art there is a significant difference between Serbia and Croatia, between South and North, between East and West. The South -East is more unrestrained and has a large output of original material, sometimes good, sometimes bad, just pouring out. The North and West are more organised. They set the standard. They are our connection to the world.'

She turned to the work of the Forum. 'What do we see here that we can use? We see a lot of people who think responsibly about the world. This transmits to people individually. It can reaffirm our conviction. You can help by listening to our

needs. But there has been a lot of intervention in our region by well-meaning people who thought that they knew better than us what could be done. What we have to do at home, nobody else can do for us.' ■

A COMMON DESTINY FOR EAST AND WEST

Post-Forum Reflections by Natasha Pejic of Belgrade

The ICF was a unique opportunity for me to glimpse the course that humanistic thought and aspiration is taking in the Western world. Although its main focus was on the role of the media in post-communist countries, it also enabled me to see the other side of the coin.

During the five days of intense debate I realized, to my amazement, that the fall of the Berlin Wall had also had a powerful impact on the West an impact one might even describe as 'a transition in post-capitalist countries'.

The Forum brought home to me vividly the rubble of the Wall, and the boundless horizon its fall has opened up. Our gathering on this 'Magic Mountain' was an attempt to re-examine our values, and to help the rebirth of the phoenix from its ashes.

It also revealed the dangers that loom ahead. In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia the independent media is struggling for a nation-wide, free-media market in the belief that unhindered competition is the key to all. The Forum discussions on the market and the media showed me the naivety of this view. The market cannot be the sole determinant of media quality. We must also emphasise high professional standards and value-oriented journalism. Freedom of the media is just a precondition for responsible journalism the journalism which does not solely strive to mirror events but also to improve their course.

On a more general note, our discussion pinpointed the danger of West and East just switching roles. Since the fall of communism, capitalism seems to be attempting to incorporate the humanistic aspects of socialist doctrine. At the same time, former communist countries, in a desperate struggle to recreate their

world, are blindly discarding every aspect of their own tradition, and praying only to the God of the market-economy.

These two processes could even, in time, lead to a more humane world. That will depend on whether we have a true exchange of experience. Now that the Wall is physically gone, such an exchange could help dissolve the Walls in our mindset. The Forum did precisely that.■