



**As the former Programme Officer for the former Yugoslavia with HEKS, the Swiss Interchurch Agency (1993-2001) I learned to appreciate medienhilfe very much.**

**On their initiative a regular platform for Swiss development organisations was established, exchanging information, coordinating public activities in Switzerland and getting latest updates from Roland Brunner and Nena Skopljanac and their media partners from the conflict region.**

**Together we published the newspaper “Brückenschlag” (Bridges) on the actual situation and ongoing projects in the Balkans.**

**Before Nato started its war on Kosovo, medienhilfe, SAH and HEKS provided a platform for moderate representatives from Kosovo, with public debates addressing the large Kosovo-Albanian diaspora in Switzerland, to counter-balance the radical forces here.**

**A highlight of our cooperation was the two seminars “Peace from the Roots” 1997 and “Recovery, Return, Reconciliation” 2000 with some 40 committed peace, human rights and media activists from all parts of the former Yugoslavia and from other conflict areas such as Palestine, South Africa and Chile, gathering for a full week in the Pestalozzi Children’s Village in Trogen.**

**We benefited from the good contacts and the know-how of medienhilfe. Participants experienced empowerment and used the opportunity for cross-border networking and for planning common projects. For me this cooperation with medienhilfe brought strong inputs and lasting friendships for which I am still very grateful.**

**Arne Engeli, ex-Programme Officer HEKS for the former Yugoslavia**

lateral declaration of Slovene independence. Yugoslavia slips into war, drawn by forces that fight for their own interests and power. The short war in Slovenia is followed in summer 1991 by the war in Croatia and from 1992 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The previously stable, peaceful and relatively wealthy country becomes lost in chaos, ethno-nationalism and open racism, gross human rights violations and war crimes. War is back in Europe, dashing hopes for peace with pictures reminding us of the horrors of World War II.

### **Medienhilfe as commitment and voluntarism**

Zurich, 1992: The war in Yugoslavia causes distress and compassion all over Switzerland. In manifestations thousands of people show their sympathy. Also media workers are challenged professionally by this war. With all the nationalist hatred and the war propaganda reaching us from the area, professional reporting appears to be “mission impossible”. Almost no one here knows the country, its economic, social and political reality. Some have memories of holidays on the beautiful Adriatic coast and recall the warm hospitality of the people. But how do we find out what’s really going on in a country so close, yet unknown? Who can we believe in this propaganda war full of hate-speech? Who can we trust as a source of news and information? How shall media workers interpret reports and inform a wider public on the actual situation?

Compassion and interest in this case translate into commitment. A group of media workers in Zurich make contacts with journalists in the former Yugoslavia who were known to be resisting the hate-speech and war propaganda and trying to combat the nationalistic horror with their professional work. These contacts provide the source of information for our work. But the reports on war crimes don’t cease to come in. On December 18, 1992, journalists from the former Yugoslavia, the newly independent Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) are invited to Switzerland. The conference “Information instead of propaganda” brings some 200 participants together. *Thomas Fleiner*, professor of constitutional law, and the participants agree: state-controlled media in all parts of the former Yugoslavia have contributed to the war to a large extent and are therefore also guilty. The conference lays the basis for the founding of Medienhilfe Ex-Jugoslawien (Media Aid Ex-Yugoslavia). A constituting assembly on January 10, 1993, defines the goals of the new





**medienhilfe started operating 15 years ago.**

**At the time, I was a member of the Swiss National Parliament and professionally working as the person in charge of intercultural pedagogy in the town of Lucerne.**

**In both functions I was convinced of the work medienhilfe does: as a politician, I am aware of the importance of informed, non-inflammatory media for the formation of political awareness. As an organizer of study trips to the West Balkans I knew very well about the disastrous role of the media in creating and spreading stereotypes and prejudices and reducing people to enemies, ultimately leading to war. Therefore I have been following the work of medienhilfe with the greatest interest and sympathy.**

**Since I started working as the director of the feminist peace NGO cfd (Christian Peace Service), running also a project in Palestine with partners in the media field, this interest got even deeper.**

**I hope the cooperation between medienhilfe and cfd will continue with mutual benefit for both organisations!  
I wish medienhilfe the financial security to continue its important work.**

**Cécile Bühlmann, Executive Director cfd  
– Christian Peace Service**

*Bridges of Communications* – the slogan is our program. In cooperation with the Swiss Foreign Ministry, Political Division for Human Security, a large-scale program for the West Balkans is established, aiming at peace promotion through media support. In October 1996, the first edition of Medienhilfe-Info is published.

Some time ago Medienhilfe became the focal point for Swiss relief and development agencies starting to work in the former Yugoslavia. We coordinate “Infokreis Ex-Jugoslawien”, a regular platform for program officers of Swiss organizations. Medienhilfe provides insights and contacts, organizes common activities such as the newspaper *Brückenschlag*, published for the International Day of Human Rights, and the seminars “Peace from the Roots” and “Return, Recovery, Reconciliation”. For a whole week these seminars bring together some 20 representatives from countries in conflict with Swiss development experts, to evaluate the work being done, develop further perspectives and plan new activities and co-operation.

#### **Media fighting for democracy**

After years of oppression by the Serbian regime against the Albanian population, the year 2000 brings another war to the region. Serbian troops expel the Albanian population from Kosovo, until Nato starts a war against Serbia, forcing Serbian troops out of Kosovo and establishing a UN protectorate. Medienhilfe Ex-Jugoslawien immediately helps the local media in Kosovo to rebuild the destroyed infrastructure and the Albanian-language outlets, oppressed for many years. But from the very beginning, also the non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo and inter-ethnic media projects are part of our mission. Cooperation between Albanian, Serbian and Turkish language radio stations is established, with the active involvement of Medienhilfe.

November 2000: Not least thanks to the long-lasting engagement of independent media, Slobodan Milosevic is finally forced out of power in Serbia. Also here, Medienhilfe provides vital support. As in other countries, we engage in supporting the young and fragile democracies: specific election projects are designed together with local media partners, explaining to citizens the election process, providing a civic, peaceful and democratic platform for the struggle over opinions and political options.

As the situation in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia slowly stabilizes, Macedonia – considered by many a haven of peace and stability in the Balkans – falls into a short, but intense crisis in 2001. Open warfare between the Macedonian army and Macedonian-Albanian





**medienhilfe supports professional and independent media in Central and Southeast Europe since 15 years.**

**Our perception of reality is shaped by what is published in the media and how it is portrayed there. Media play an important role in the society of each country when it comes to questions of social cohabitation and political control. medienhilfe contributes substantially to peaceful conflict resolution and sustainable peace in Central and Southeast Europe.**

**In the framework of its development cooperation, the Government of Liechtenstein supports the project “Multilingual Media Productions”. It contributes with its funding to sustaining the cooperation of local independent radio stations in Kosovo and private TV broadcasters in Macedonia. medienhilfe is an appreciated and trusted partner we gladly cooperate with.**

**I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of medienhilfe for their huge commitment in this field of work so important for the development of Central and Southeast Europe.**

**Rita Kieber-Beck,  
Member of the Government of Liechtenstein,  
Minister for External Affairs,  
Culture, Family and Gender Equity**

nia to the Ukraine, from Hungary to Macedonia. Some six million Roma live in these countries as the largest stateless minority in Europe, often subject to racist prejudices and attacks.

Medienhilfe is concerned not only with minorities and their rights. As committed as we are to the disadvantaged, we must not forget that the problem is mainly the attitude of the dominant and ruling parts of society. The reform of the armed forces is one of the biggest challenges the new democracies face. Until recently the so-called security structures were seen by most people as a threat to their security rather than a protection. The democratic control of army and police, their subordination under politically elected and democratically accountable responsibilities, the transparency of their structures and functioning are unknown regions for the citizens of these countries. And these forces often find it difficult to adapt to democratic procedures and public. Together with DCAF, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Medienhilfe organizes two conferences in Macedonia and in Serbia. *Boris Tadic*, at the time Minister of Defense in Serbia, and the Swiss Ambassador opened the conference in Belgrade. Participants, high-ranking army staff and media representatives, discuss freedom of information and its limitations in professional reporting.

#### **Comprehensive understanding and support**

Medienhilfe Ex-Jugoslawien shows progress also institutionally: in 2001 the association is entered in the Business Register, at the same time recognized as a tax-exempt organization of public interest. We also receive the right to employ civil servants.

Expanding geographically beyond the former Yugoslavia also brings a change of name. In 2002, celebrating ten years since the founding, Medienhilfe Ex-Jugoslawien becomes medienhilfe. An Advisory Council to support the work of medienhilfe is established with personalities from trade and industry, politics and culture. Building on the volunteer organization motivated by compassion and commitment against the war, a professional organization is formed with regular staff, programs in more than ten countries and a broad range of thematic competence. In 2005 a Steering Board is established as a strategic body to guide the work of medienhilfe. One year later the next changes come: in order

