



to direct people's frustrations away from economic and social issues and towards ethno-political confrontations.

Accordingly, the remaining ethno-political conflicts have a significant potential for escalation. Violent riots in Kosovo in March 2004 are clear indicators of that. A comprehensive rational, political and integrative approach to minority issues is therefore one important aspect in peace-building and conflict prevention in the area. Media play a significant role in this respect.

The issue of minorities and media has been an important component of medienhilfe's work in the Western Balkan since 2000. We have approached it as follows:

- The treatment of minorities is the indicator for the stage of democracy in a given society. Minorities with equal rights to participate in all social and political affairs constitute an integral part of society.
- Public awareness about minorities and minority-related issues is the best way to exert public pressure for respect of minority rights and to prevent minority issues from becoming matters of conflict or even crisis.
- Support to the media of ethnic and national minorities provides minorities with their own media channels to address the issues of politics and society as an inherent part of comprehensive community-building, democratic institution-building and long-term conflict prevention. Mutual understanding has to build on the awareness of one's own identity, culture and challenges, and on the issues related to the surrounding majority community, to facilitate participation and integration.

medienhilfe's strategy for support to minority media is two-fold and consists of two complementary components:

- Support to minority media as the tool for empowerment of their respective minority community, enabling them to better articulate their interests, and encouraging them to participate in social and political developments in society at large.
- Support to co-production projects of media that target minority and majority populations, in order to build mutual acceptance and understanding among the different ethnic communities and contribute to better social cohesion and integration.

medienhilfe's work in the Western Balkans has a strong focus on Kosovo, where minorities are particularly vulnerable, excluded from the mainstream society and exposed to discrimination

and human rights violations. Minority media are supported too in multi-ethnic areas in Serbia (Vojvodina and Sandzak), as well as in Macedonia, where inter-ethnic relations are still fragile and burdened with conflicts. Since 2003, the work was expanded to other countries in Southeast and East Europe with the launching of a regional program to support Roma media.

medienhilfe gained valuable experience and expertise with inter-ethnic co-production projects. Launched in 2002, Cross-ethnic radio programming in Kosovo (CerpiK) unites eight radio stations addressing the Albanian, Serb, Turkish, Bosnian and Roma communities. A similar project of seven TV stations addressing the Macedonian and Albanian communities in Macedonia started in the same year. Both are still the only media projects that enable the flow of information across ethnic lines in these two divided societies. The Albanian language in a radio program in Northern Mitrovica was taboo five years ago. Nowadays, CerpiK is the most popular program.

Especially successful is the project Roma Media Co-production Fund, which supports radio and TV co-productions of Roma and non-Roma media in ten countries. Programs supported in the last cycle reached an audience of over four million. The programs present the Roma in a new way, challenging stereotypes and racist attitudes widely spread among the mainstream population and helping to overcome the social exclusion the Roma have been exposed to.

medienhilfe is about to launch a Middle East Media Program. Also here, representation of minorities in the media is an important issue. Our program will strengthen Arab media outlets in Israel, support media in Jordan addressing issues relevant for the huge Palestinian refugee population, and provide for regional program exchange, cooperation and networking.

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