**Alternatives – Media reforms for media integrity and future of independent journalism**

**Search for alternatives to corrupt media systems in the countries of South East Europe**

**SEE Media Observatory’s final regional conference**

**Novi Sad, 13 June 2016**

**Opening session:** **Future of independent journalism and media in SEE – Importance of emancipatory media policy and citizens perspective**

**Welcome speech by Brankica Petković,**

Peace Institute, Ljubljana, SEE Media Observatory project coordinator

Dear friends and colleagues,

we are honoured by your participation in the final conference of our regional project South East European Media Observatory – Building Capacities and Coalitions for Monitoring Media Integrity and Advancing Media Reforms, a project which, since 2013, connects ten civil society organisations from our region and the Guardian Foundation as an affiliate partner.

This is a fourth year of our joint work on research and advocacy, but also support to investigative journalists and other civil society organisations, all of that aimed at sparking debate on media and democracy in our countries.

We started with the question why media in our countries do not serve democracy and public interest. We have introduced a concept of media integrity with own analytical framework in order to better understand how our media systems works.

With media integrity we denote public service values in media and journalism.

Our first comprehensive research on media integrity in five countries was released in 2014 and it clearly showed how deeply corrupt are our media systems.

And corrupt media spells the death for democracy, as we underlined in that study titled "Media integrity matters".

After number of thematic research and monitoring actions that followed, debates that we organised, investigative stories on media and corruption that we supported, we have invited you to this regional meeting to talk about changes, about alternatives and about ways to save integrity and future of independent journalism in our region.

We consider this a meeting of pro-media integrity people who care and want to do something.

We are grateful particularly to speakers for accepting invitation, including our colleagues from other parts of Europe who have joined us at this regional debate.

I must mention that we did also a small research on positive examples of media or institutions which promote and protect media integrity. Two our opening speakers are representing such organisations, and several others are also here: we salute to their efforts.

As a regional coordinator of this project for almost four years I want to thank to the European Union for its core and generous support to our work, to the Open Society Foundations for their important contribution and to a number of smaller donors.

But most importantly, our ideas and actions have been possible because of hard work of the project team in ten countries, as well as our grantees and supporters in media integrity coalitions.

We hope that our contribution to demanding media reforms in our countries will bring some results, and that today's debates will generate some new and clear ideas how to proceed, which alternatives exist and which are worth fighting for.