

Polis – Bashing Bosnia?

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Here's the latest from the Sarajevo Media and Politics conference, organised by the [British Council](#).

Tony Blair is not the only politician frustrated by the 'feral' instincts of the press. Here in Bosnia and Herzegovina the leading politician, Nebojsa Radmanovic, a Presiding Member of the Presidency, has been telling a media and politics conference that he is sick of media stories about how much his department spends on coffee and fuel for the official cars:

"If you go through daily newspapers and see what they say about the presidency it's all about the coffee we drink or how many cars in the car pool. We need to find people who are corrupt but the media are not contributing to the building of the state and state structures."

At the coffee break the assembled journalists from the Balkans were furious with his attitude. But when a country is as fragile as Bosnia and as economically immature, does the news media have an extra responsibility to treat the political system with respect? As Mr Radmanovic said, public trust in politics and the media is already very low here because people still fear that violent ethnic and religious politics will re-emerge:

'politicians in any country in transition always have a bad reputation because the public know that they were compromised in the recent past...journalists are also not trusted and so bad professional conduct on both sides leads to loss of trust by the public..'

Mr Radmanovic suggested that his government ought to spend money on public relations to counter the negative image of Bosnia in the wider world. Again, it's the kind of idea that makes any self-respecting journalist scoff. But as another speaker said at this conference, Rotherham MP Denis MacShane, is that so different to the billions of dollars spent by the US State Department on *Voice of America* or 'fact-finding' trips to Washington? Or even the millions the UK Foreign Office spends through the British Council on conferences like the one I am at today in the sweltering heat of Sarajevo?

Personally, I think that the Bosnian government ought to spend the effort, if not money, on improving the state of training and wages for Bosnian journalists. As another politician at the event pointed out, "I never have problems with the questions of journalists because they do not have enough time to prepare, so it's easy to answer their questions. There is enormous pressure on them because they are so badly paid and have so little time to do their job properly."

Sound familiar?

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