



INTERNATIONAL
PRESS INSTITUTE

WORLD CONGRESS AND
57TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Belgrade June 15th

IPI Opening Ceremony Speech

Mirjana Milošević, Media Center, Director

Your Excellency Mr. President, distinguished ministers, Your Excellencies, Mr Niemczycky, Mr Dadge, distinguished participants of IPI World Congress, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour and pleasure to be your host and finally welcome you to Belgrade and the 2008 IPI World Congress!

The 2008 IPI Congress is organized by Media Center, the place where Serbian and international journalists feel at home and where crucial social issues including freedom of the media are being discussed on a daily basis. We are an organization, founded by Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia, supporting journalists in their struggle to improve ambient for media, sharing and promoting the same values as IPI.

When I started working at the Media Center, the biggest task ahead of me and the small but very professional team was to prepare and organize this Congress. In spite of organizing different events every day, there were times when we were wondering if we can stand up to the standards set up in 2006 by BBC in Edinburgh and Huryet in Istanbul last year. During the last year and a half we have challenged our limits. We have also challenged perceptions we had about ourselves and our abilities, but more importantly our perceptions about Belgrade and Serbia and people here. By working to bring international media professionals to Belgrade, and cooperating closely with organizers of other important events in Belgrade, we learned that this city, this country and people here have much more to offer than we originally thought. We learned that Government, City institutions and commercial companies can work together with media professionals to successfully organize the event where the press freedom issues will be discussed. Never before have we seen such an interest within the media circles and the Serbian public for a professional media event.

For us this Congress is all about the perceptions. Many years ago, in his book, *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippman, American writer, journalist, and political commentator wrote that "Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth's surface (and) moves in a small circle. ...Of any event, that has wide effects, we see at best only a phase and an aspect."

Media people are not an exception. We often tend to see only parts of the picture and then transfer this aspect of the story or simplified version of it to our readers, viewers, listeners...

Events like this are perfect opportunity to try and see more than usual. We have worked hard to give you, our international guests the opportunity to see and experience different aspect of Belgrade and Serbia first hand and directly observe the society we live in. We will be very interested to hear if your perceptions have changed after the Congress is over. Our views to what is possible and achievable here have changed and we are certain that potentials of this country and its people will be seen even more in the future.

Nevertheless, discussing and rethinking perceptions of Serbia and Balkans today is just a beginning of number of opportunities we will have during the Congress to question images created and challenged by contemporary media: from how the rest of the world reports on America to how the new media contribute to greater number of sources and information available to citizens worldwide. Not long ago, if you looked only at media images, it was hard to imagine that Afro American could become an American president. ; it was hard to perceive China as one of the world fastest developing countries, it was very hard to recognize that we live in interconnected world sharing numerous common problems - to name only some - environmental issues, food and oil scarcity etc. Not long ago, it seemed impossible to engage such a distinguished audience in Serbia for the press freedom topics.

The world is changing and media if not leading, need to follow. We as media professionals have the obligation to report on the world as it is and not as it used to be.

Let me welcome you once again to Belgrade and thank you, IPI and all the institutions, organizations, companies and individuals who have helped us to make this event possible.

I hope that Being together in Belgrade in June 2008 will give us number of memorable experiences and some answers to increasingly complex questions of role of media and media professionals in the world.