

FROM EMERGENCY TO DEVELOPMENT MEDIA: THE IMPOSSIBLE METAMORPHOSIS  
OF PROJECT SPEAR IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Project SPEAR--Support Program for Emergency Assistance by Radio--a radio program set up by Media Action International to address the humanitarian needs for information of refugees fleeing the Kosovo War. Using a personal journal as the main record-keeping device, I look at efforts to transform an emergency media project into a development media program after the target group for the emergency programming returned home. Left behind was an equally traumatized native population, awash in corruption and the need for its own development. I examine some of the challenges faced in the ultimately failed transformation.

## FROM EMERGENCY TO DEVELOPMENT MEDIA: THE IMPOSSIBLE

### METAMORPHOSIS OF PROJECT SPEAR IN ALBANIA

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#### Introduction

A quick web search shows that media, particularly radio, are being used around the world to foster peace. Sponsored by governments, the United Nations, NGOs, and a variety of foundations, the projects can be divided into two categories: media for emergency situations and media for more long-term development of civil society. The first category includes provision of balanced news; conditions on the ground determine whether that news is local, regional, or international, along with immediate information about the physical environment--availability of resources, safety, food, shelter, transportation, etc. Reunification of families and loved ones is generally crucial to emergency media as well.

Media for development often follows the major disruption--after the most intense aspects of the war, political coup, natural disaster, drought, or outbreak of a serious disease have either subsided or become part of the landscape. Topics included in this kind of media are more varied, but usually include an educational focus: health and child care, farming and the environment, human and women's rights, literacy classes, as well as the topics covered in emergency media: conflict resolution, availability of special resources and family reunification. Often disempowered groups--women, youth, farmers, minority ethnic groups, rural dwellers, refugees, etc.--are the target audiences.

The separation of the two categories is artificial, of course. Although they begin with different goals, the more successful emergency projects often metamorphose into long-term projects designed to foster specific development goals. Often, it is the lack of development that led to the emergency conditions in the first place. Both kinds of programs use similar cultural components: music, metaphor, story-telling, and non-violent imagery. It has been documented in many places that, over time, the target groups often feel ownership of the programs and come to depend on them for information, as well as less tangible things like community,

companionship and entertainment (see, e.g., Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Sood, Singhal, & Law, 1997; Vaughn & Rogers, 1997; Windborne, 1999). The more well crafted programs, particularly soap operas, tend to sustain popularity indefinitely. However, it is not always the popularity of programs that determine whether they will stay on air, it is the willingness of the sponsors to continue their support.

This paper addresses one such program and the (failed) effort to move from an emergency media program to a development-oriented program. The initial program was aimed at a group of desperate Kosovar refugees who had fled to Albania escaping persecution and violence at home. The development-oriented program was aimed at the native population of Albania, a group desperate in their own way. This paper is very personal, based on my own journal entries from July 8 - October 22, 1999. Nevertheless, our experience may contribute some useful insight to the on-going efforts to use media to help build a more peaceful world.

#### The setting

After the failure of the talks at Rambouillet, NATO determined that the only way to stop the humanitarian abuses in Kosovo was to bomb the forces of Yugoslavian leader, Slobodan Milosovich. At the falling of the bombs, over half a million ethnic Albanians fled from Kosovo into neighboring Albania and Macedonia. The international community set up camps as temporary shelter for the refugees. However, it quickly became clear that the lack of communication between the refugees and the international agencies offering the assistance was contributing to the panic and despondency of the refugee population. A three-locale radio operation was set up to provide emergency information to the refugees with centers in Tirana, Albania, Skopje, Macedonia, and Pristina, Kosovo. The Albania operation was the first of the three to go into operation under the name Project SPEAR: Support Program for Emergency Assistance by Radio. My role was to manage Project SPEAR after its first three months of existence. It turned out to be the period when the refugees were returning home. The refugees began their return to Kosovo much sooner than the international community anticipated; by the end of my four-month stay in Albania, they were almost all gone. As the refugees left Albania, it would seem natural that the emergency radio program should gradually shut down, which in fact

it did. However, given the chaos and corruption of Albanian society, the equally important needs of the native Albanian population for independent information and development assistance could have been addressed. Albania's least powerful citizens believed that the international community had promised to reward Albania for its generosity to its Kosovar neighbors. Instead, they watched as, one by one, the international organizations packed up and drove away. The opportunity to reinforce Albania's struggling economic and political institutions and to foster the beginnings of civil society was ultimately discarded. After broadcasting independent news and information for seven months, Project SPEAR was also refused further funding. The radio program went silent, one more symbol that Albania was being left behind.

#### The project

Project SPEAR in Albania was coordinated by the International Center for Humanitarian Reporting (ICHR) later named Media Action International (MAI). Funding came from a wide variety of sources, including UNHCR, UNESCO, Red Cross, Soros Foundation, and the British Department for International Development. The project was centered in a journalism training center in Tirana and fitted with computers that were used for production of the program. Ten local journalists, seven from Tirana and three from Kukes, along with a computer specialist, a secretary and a driver, became the Albanian team. The editor was a journalism instructor at the university who worked both as managing editor and as a reporter. The program was a twice daily (morning and evening) half-hour show with a

[F]ocus on humanitarian information destined specifically for the Kosovar refugee population, including public health information, on-site logistics, communiqués from the relief agencies operating in the field, psycho-social support, missing persons, and programs designed specifically for children (program description from ICHR).

The project aired on the first channel of Radio Tirana, an almost nation-wide system that included a short-wave to Europe, and medium wave and FM channels in Albania. It also aired on Radio Kukes, a semi-autonomous state-run radio station in the North near the border, and on two private music stations based in Tirana. Tirana-based journalists traveled to the sites of the stories, recorded onto minidisk or cassette, and returned to the base office where their stories

were produced and mixed into the final show. Reporters based at Radio Kukes produced their programs there then sent their work on cassette to Tirana by taxi, a six-hour ride. Albanian journalists also traveled to Kosovo to report from there and to lend their skills to the MAI sister projects. With projects in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo, the organization intended that the three should share information and, when feasible, stories. Although we tried many times to make shared resources and stories a regular part of our operation, things rarely worked out that way. The Albania project generally worked autonomously, even when our reporters went over to Kosovo.

### Theory

The role of media and journalism in conflict situations has long been debated, but most Western writers argue that journalists should remain objectively independent from the stories they cover. Shpiro (2002), for example, traces patterns of media policies in key conflicts since World War II. He argues that NATO manipulated the role of reporters in the Kosovo war. In planning for the 1999 conflict in Kosovo, NATO set out a clear strategy to "create so much news that it would dominate the headlines...[T]he humanitarian tragedy of the Kosovo refugees overshadowed the fact that many of NATO's initial claims proved a far cry from battlefield reality" (p. 80). Shpiro's arguments are consistent with the findings of Nohrstedt, et al. (2000) and Robinson (2000) that modern journalism can drive public opinion and thus, public policy, in times of war. Moeller (2002) traced the role of media coverage of international events and its ability to influence political policy. She found that "media are more influential after a policy is in place than before" (p. 390). However, "[t]he unequivocal effect of the media is not to change or even shift policy but to influence its timing--and especially to compress the time available for making policy decisions" (p. 386). Robinson (2000) argues that "media coverage can trigger the use of air power but not the employment of ground troop [*sic*] during humanitarian crises" (p. 410). Rieff (2000) believes that a "media-driven humanitarian crisis" caused institutional and governmental donors to "press" funds on humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to aid the refugees fleeing Kosovo for Albania and Macedonia (p. 26). Indeed, as televisions

around the world showed old women and children trudging on snow-covered roads toward the Albanian border, international aid for the refugees began to flow.

While the role of media coverage for audiences outside the crisis has been explored from a number of angles, little has been written about using media for peace-building, emergency communications and conflict resolution in war zones. In December 1998, a workshop called "Strengthening Lifeline Media in Regions of Conflict" met in Cape Town, South Africa (Adam & Hieber, 1998). The workshop, organized by the International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting (Media Action International), included practitioners from sixty media and peace-building organizations. The workshop explored several key points described in the Executive Summary:

- War reporting vs. Pro-social programming
- Conflict management training for journalists
- Emphasis on journalistic ethics in war zones
- Partnerships among constituencies
- Redefining evaluation goals
- Community involvement in peace-building initiatives
- Emphasis on sustainability
- New journalistic paradigm

The purpose of Project SPEAR was not peace-building per se, but rather, the emergency communications needed to protect the victims of war. Nevertheless, the themes of the workshop are consistent with some of the realities and goals of Project SPEAR during the Kosovo crisis. Participants in the workshop, basing their position on a report called *The Role of Media in Regions of Conflict* (Adam & Thomotheram, 1995) argued that: Conflict situations need more than traditional war reporting; rather, media can be used to assist in peace-building. Journalists who pride themselves on their ability to get stories out quickly should be careful not to "inflame" the situation with the way they report events. The community should be involved both in the peace-building initiative and in the evaluation of the project. Finally, the need to create sustainable, community-empowering projects "with an exit strategy which ideally involves handing over the media initiative to reputable community or NGO representatives" was

emphasized (Executive Summary). The following is an attempt to frame my own experience within the ideal objectives set out at the Conflict Media conference.

### A New Journalistic Paradigm

The purpose of Project SPEAR was to offer humanitarian assistance to refugees by giving them the information they needed to survive as refugees in a strange land. In Albania, all but one of the twelve reporters had been trained as journalists at the university. Two of them were professional radio announcers at Radio Tirana. Media Action International trained them further, and hired as editor a journalism professor named Iris who had also worked in the US. While the purpose of their work was the spread of humanitarian information, the goal was to maintain a level of objectivity that made their reports neutral, non-partisan, and therefore, reliable. Since Albanian nationals and Kosovar Albanian refugees were of the same ethnic group, it was comparatively easy to maintain that objectivity because the reporters and the victims were of the same ethnic group, and in general, the reporters were not faced with the aggressors. In Macedonia, the reporters' life experience was quite different. Mistrust among ethnic Albanian staff members of the Serbian-speaking Bosnian manager, along with their anger at the Serbians, created a climate of acrimony and incompetence that led to many problems with the program. In Kosovo, MAI's effort to offer humanitarian information to both Albanians and Serbs in the province began with Albanian and Serbian reporters on separate floors of the building refusing to speak to each other and occasionally threatening violence. For a while, the lone, remaining Serbian reporter refused to go out of the building to cover stories in fear for his life. Gradually, the situation subsided, but it was never smooth.

Early in the life of the Kosovo project, our editor and I went to Mitrovica to gather some stories to bring back to Albania. The Kosovo Albanian reporters, as well as the Serbian and the Macedonian reporters had lived with the strife between ethnic groups all of their lives. They carried anger, resentment and fear that became palpable at times. The following excerpts from my journal describe some of the results of their emotions. Journal entries are italicized.

*August 5: We took the opportunity to go places with the journalists from the other projects. On the way to a town called Skanderei, the driver drove like he couldn't imagine one*

*moment beyond the present. He would speed up as fast as he could go, then slam on the brakes at the next pothole. One young journalist from Kosovo explained that the holes were places mines had been planted....She said that the coming of the Russians as part of the UN "peacekeeping force" would do anything but keep the peace. Russian mercenaries had helped the Serbs kill hundreds of Albanians and there was no way Albanians would accept them in their towns. When she said "no way," her voice shook with anger...It would be a tall request to ask this traumatized young woman for objective treatment of Serbs or Russians in her stories.*

Iris and the other Albanians from Tirana had not had such personal conflict with the Serbs or their allies. They managed to hold onto an emotional detachment when they were in Kosovo. Still, the mandate from MAI not to report in a way that inflamed pre-existing anger was not always easy to maintain

*We go to Mitrovica. It is a city divided: Serbians on one side of the river and Albanians on the other. In the middle is a bridge patrolled by KFOR soldiers (the international peace-keeping force)... Four blocks away, a house is burning. It is a gypsy house. They were the target of angry Albanians because they sided with the Serbs....As we wander toward the burning house, people begin to come out onto the sidewalks to speak to us. An Albanian woman is cautious about speaking in Albanian. Her husband is missing, she says. He was taken away by the Serbs and she never found out where he was. Her little five-year-old girl and three-year-old son look up at her as she speaks. "I even looked for him in the mass graves, but I found no sign of him," she says without emotion. Her friend cannot suppress tears and turns away from us. The sounds of explosions and gunfire echo in the background.*

*We move to the Serbian side of the bridge near a cafe full of young people. While the Albanians on the other side of the bridge are searching for lost loved ones, these people are hanging around drinking whiskey and coffee and listening to loud pop music. We are afraid for Iris because she is Albanian. And fearless. We tell her to tell anyone who asks that she is Finnish. That way, she could speak in English to the Serbs, and no one would suspect her as Albanian...The first person she approached picked up her press pass from around her neck and read it. Luckily, it identified the organization, not the country she came from...We interviewed a young Serb who was angry at Milosovich for putting them at war, but he had little remorse for*



*what was done to the Albanians. He longed for a return to the Serbian monarchy. ..In the background, on the other side of the bridge, devastation is everywhere. Iris keeps her cool as the young man calls for a Serbian nation.*

Iris was particularly cool and detached from the scenes into which she plunged herself. Her previous training and relentless drive kept her very controlled, even in dangerous circumstances. A few days later, she went back.

*August 14: Iris was off to Kosovo on Friday. While the news decried new outbreaks of violence in the province, she talked of wanting to go to the Serbian towns she had avoided when she was there in July. This time, she wants to take one of the Serb journalists with her so they can both get a good story. He will act as her translator.*

*She stood before me in our office in Tirana, once again in the red cocktail dress and red high heels she wore in Mitrovica...The unsettled air of Mitrovica just eleven days ago comes to mind. Mine explosions and sniper attacks flash through my head. I hear myself say, "Even though you look extremely pretty, I would appreciate it if you would wear some shoes you can run in."...A fleeting look of fear comes across her face but disappears almost immediately. She leaves the next morning.*

It wasn't as easy for some of the other journalists to maintain their objectivity. On a trip back from Kosovo I took a taxi with one of our journalists from Albania, a young man named Gerti. The driver was from Kosovo.

*September 18: As the road begins to climb up over the huge lake that runs along the border, we come upon a line of big rocks in the road. The driver goes around them, but no one makes a gesture to remove them even though there are steep drops and signs on the sides of the road warning of mines. The men in front begin talking. Gerti interprets for me: the rocks make a roadblock so bandits can kidnap someone...Suddenly, Gerti is tense. His mouth is set in a humorless line. His anger is visible. The other guys are asking him questions but he is monosyllabic, when he answers at all.*

*"What's wrong?" I ask in English.*

*"They are saying bad things about Albanians."*

*Not knowing the intentions of these men, I become alarmed that we could end up walking on this dangerous road, easy bait for robbers, miles from anywhere. To relieve the tension, I begin friendly chatter about their hometown and lives. As they brag about their town of Prizren, Gerti can barely stand to interpret. I pray he will not start a fight.*

*Gerti is still fuming when we get to the hotel. "They were saying 'We should be brothers but now Albanians are trying to kill us.' They were saying all Albanians are killers and robbers and that Albanians are not civilized. They forget that Albanians opened their homes to Kosovars, that we took care of them during the crisis without asking for anything in return." Gerti is disgusted. And truly hurt. Kosovars don't like Albanians and the feeling is mutual.*

As the Kosovars began their gradual return to their homes, the Albanians breathed a collective sigh of relief. There were dozens of stories about the ungrateful guests turning up their noses at the Albanian accommodations. It was clear one of the reasons the Kosovars went home so quickly was because they were used to more comforts than their Albanian hosts could provide. The Kosovars had truly been through some serious trauma, but the Albanians had also suffered--from years of isolation and corruption, from a crumbling economy and infrastructure, from violence between ethnic groups, unemployment and chaos at every level. In 1997, a majority of Albanians lost their savings and pensions to a corrupt pyramid scheme sponsored by the government. They were still trying to recuperate when the Kosovars descended upon them. The history of the recent Albanian hardships manifest itself in the lives of our journalists a number of ways.

### Partnerships among Constituencies

Although Radio Tirana had a clearly defined organizational hierarchy, competition was intense between the General Manager of Radio-TV and his underling, the Director of Radio. The initial agreement with Radio Tirana included lump sum payments to the General Manager of Radio-TV for the use of the facilities. The amount per month was more than his annual salary. Because of the emergency, the GM was paid in cash for the first month with the agreement that he would provide a bank account number and MAI would deposit the rest. He didn't provide the number, and the money waited to be transferred from Geneva to Radio Tirana. After the first

three months of Project SPEAR, just a few days after my arrival, the Director of Radio had a message for me.

*July 25: (We had just finished our shows for Saturday and Sunday. They were exceptionally good.) I was feeling great. Until the phone rang...It was the director of Radio Tirana saying he is canceling our program. As of today. Why? Although we negotiated a contract to continue on Radio Tirana for another three months, we did so with his boss and never dealt with the Radio Director himself. This may have been a tactical error on my part...It seemed to be all about money....*

*Not knowing the history of the missing bank account number, I apologized for being in arrears and promised to get the money to the station as soon as possible. The next day, the General Manager called and promised to give us the bank account number when he returned to the country on Monday. We waited to hear from him.*

*But no one had talked with the Director of Radio. "No one has negotiated any contract with me," he said. "The General Manager did not tell me he has made an agreement and I have contracted to play another program in that time slot." After much cajoling by our savvy editor, he agreed to allow us to play only twenty minutes of the show on Saturday...*

Somehow, the program stayed on the air, but the relationship between the Director of Radio and Media Action International became increasingly frayed. We were never given the bank account number, and the money, therefore, remained unpaid until very late in the project. The Director simply wanted me to put the cash--thousands of dollars--in his hands. He resorted to innumerable power moves, including playing international organizations against each other. Several organizations had plans for radio programs on Radio Tirana, including the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and BBC. We had worked with both organizations and our project received money from the same sources, but in this case, the Radio Director sought to position us as competitors with each other. As the BBC attempted to negotiate a new development-oriented soap opera, the Director insisted that they hire his friends--aging men whose radio style was quite inappropriate for the soap opera's youth-oriented focus. IOM, on the other hand, had hired one of the Radio Director's cronies to host its program; the Director wanted us to do the same.

*August 8: Two of our journalists are also reporters for Radio Tirana. When they were hired by MAI, they were hired at the same rate as the other Albanian journalists--\$500 a month. The \$500 rate is set by UN standards and in cooperation with (one of the foundations) who funded the first three months of the program...*

*The money has caused a big problem at Radio Tirana...The Director of Radio makes less than these young journalists...The Director wants me to fire all of our reporters and to have all the journalists who work for us be employees of Radio Tirana; then I would give him the money for all their salaries and he will dole out what he thinks the journalists are worth. "The rest will go to the general operation of Radio Tirana," he says.*

Of course, I would never agree to such an arrangement, so the Director sought ways to sabotage the program without totally severing ties with us. (We did, after all, promise to pay thousands of dollars for the air time.) He claimed he had promised our time slot to the IOM program, then proceeded to move our show around to unpredictable time-slots. A long series of meetings with the Director began. We managed to keep the show on the air with only one or two days canceled. We were already airing the program on two private stations in Tirana. I began to contact the owners of other private stations around the country. The station owners were quite happy to carry the program. And, they were willing to take a fraction of the amount we paid to Radio Tirana, but each station's reach was only a small portion of the area covered by Radio Tirana. Along with the limited reach of the stations' sound was the difficulty of getting the program to the stations every day. We worked out an elaborate scheme of taxis and the postal service that was at least somewhat reliable three times a week. We managed to cover the north and central areas of the country, which were most important, but it would be more difficult to gain access to the South, as there were fewer private radio stations there. The increasingly complex process of getting the information out to the general population as the numbers of refugees decreased made Project SPEAR in Albania increasingly more difficult to maintain.

#### Community Involvement/Emphasis on Sustainability

The conference in South Africa concluded that media projects are most effective when the community takes ownership of the project and it becomes self-sustaining within the context

of the local population, essentially turning a crisis intervention project into an on-going program that assists in more long-range problem-solving and efforts toward development. Not everyone agrees that conflict management should be linked to development. Rieff (2000) is highly critical of the role of NGOs during the Kosovo war, not because the work they did was without value, but in part because of the politics that determined the agenda of most of the NGOs working on the ground in Kosovo. "It can be argued that the response of the NGOs to the Kosovo crisis was as much a reflection of the nationality of the various agencies as of any principled debate over the proper role of humanitarian groups" (p. 30). Rieff argues that much of the work of the NGOs in Kosovo should be categorized as development work rather than crisis intervention. Atwood (2002), on the other hand, argues that development is essential to the *prevention* of conflict. Quoting the US Office of Transition Initiatives' annual recommendation to Congress (which he supervised), Atwood argues that "backing alternative media and public information campaigns to encourage peace, reconciliation and informed participation in elections" can help "bridge the gap between emergency relief and long-term sustainable development" (p. 340). In the case of Project SPEAR in Albania, it became increasingly obvious that there were many important issues that were receiving no attention either from the national or the private media, or, indeed, the international media. As the number of refugees dwindled, we gradually incorporated stories about Albanians into our show. Private radio station owners were delighted with any content that included stories about Albania, and the reporters were frequently congratulated on their Albanian stories. From my journal:

*August 15: The village in which the water for the whole Kukes region is located is rebelling. They've demanded money from the government in exchange for the water. Since they pay for utilities and taxes, they want to be compensated for their water...The villagers have cut off the water for everyone in the region...*

*Elections are coming for the national president. The choices are old enemies, the corrupt leader of the socialist party who created the pyramid scheme in 1997 that left thousands of Albanians penniless, and his rival, another thug from the South. People are afraid there will be violence as the two candidates garner their forces in Tirana. Already the sounds of gunshots are everywhere after dark. People tell me it's the political factions fighting each other.*

*August 31: Aurela is doing an economic development story about tourism on Albania's Adriatic coast. We climb a steep hill toward a hotel in the town of Golem. From the outside, it is beautiful, but as we get closer, we see it is trashed inside...As we were leaving, some construction workers came out with the owner...He launches into a tirade about his problems doing business...He could never get enough water for his hotel because the water was controlled by corrupt politicians who wanted bribes. He was afraid to speak into Aurela's microphone because he feared for his family...*

*We also take Gerti (a reporter) with us to follow up on a press release about a refugee camp in another town called Rrogoshtino...The guard outside the camp makes us wait outside as Gerti goes inside to gather information...When Gerti comes out, he says this is a refugee camp with no refugees. The Germans are establishing a center there, and if there should be any refugees in the future, not just from Kosovo but from anywhere, Albania would be ready.*

*September 9: On Monday morning, I am supposed to meet with a member of the International Organization on Migration about a women's conference. The subject is trafficking in women. Young women are brought from the villages, particularly the North, and taken to Italy where they are forced to become prostitutes. For many of them, it is simple kidnapping, but more often, there are negotiations with families. Women are seduced with promises of marriage--many grooms in the traditional societies of northern Albania still pay families for the bride--or the families are threatened, or the women are sold because the families are desperate and she is just one more non-productive mouth to feed. There is some dream she might send money back to the family, but it's not clear how often--if ever--that happens.*

*IOM will release a public service spot warning women that the romantic promise of the good life in Italy is simply a lie...For those women who escape their keepers, there is nowhere to go. Their families reject them as prostitutes; their communities also reject them...The IOM representative says he has found Albanian women's groups who claim to care about trafficking, but are afraid to speak out in public for fear of violence against themselves.*

Although there were numerous stories about crises and dangers in Albania, our coverage of such stories made some of the organizations who had helped with the initiation of Project

SPEAR uncomfortable. International funders were more interested in rebuilding Kosovo than they were in maintaining programs in Albania.

As the international funding agencies moved their focus away from Albania toward the continuing center of conflict and the rebuilding of the damaged communities in Kosovo, MAI was forced to move its focus toward its own project in Kosovo. The Macedonian project was shut down. I continued to seek funding from the remaining international organizations in Tirana, but no funds were forthcoming. Their skeletal staffs remaining were mostly short-timer expatriots on their way to the next disaster, or Albanian nationals who agreed that there was a need for development information, but because their own funds were being cut, they could not help us. They had to concentrate their energies on their own projects. Many expected to lose their positions and much of their personal energy was going toward securing one of the increasingly few jobs available. For our reporters, the story was the same. Many of their families had lost their pensions and life savings in the great pyramid scheme of 1997; they depended on the journalists' salaries as the family's main--if not only--source of income. As the days passed, it became more and more difficult to get the journalists to focus their energy on our daily reports. Every time I would send one out to interview an official from an international organization, the reporter would use the time to pitch his or her services to that official.

## Conclusion

Atwood's (2002) argument that development is the key to peace seemed particularly apropos in Albania, but the mandate of the international community was to take care of the most pressing emergency first. That was the victims of the war in Kosovo. As the initial purpose of Project SPEAR faded, there was no will on the part of the donors to continue in Albania, despite the willingness of MAI to hand over "the media initiative to reputable community or NGO representatives" as suggested by MAI's South African conference on conflict media. Still, there were many in power in Albania who were quite happy to see the foreigners leave while they themselves could get back to business as usual. For example, a few days after NATO withdrew, a shooting in the main square in Tirana began the dangerous election season. The violent supporters of one presidential candidate came down from the north into Tirana while gangs of

supporters of the other candidate resisted their incursions with more violence. Street shootings and drive-bys became more common in the city. Trafficking in women, drugs, weapons and stolen goods went back to normal while the majority of Albanians girded themselves for the inevitable winter hardships. One of our last stories was of the growing hunger in the North, not of remaining refugees, but of the usual residents.

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