Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
MANUELA ZLATEVA
CHRISTIAN SPAHR

October 2014

www.kas.de/medien-europa/en

SEEMF 2014: Animated debates on media freedom and Ukraine

WITH 300 EXPERTS FROM EAST AND WEST, THE SOUTH EAST EUROPE MEDIA FORUM WAS MORE COMPREHENSIVE THAN EVER BEFORE

300 journalists, editors-in-chief, media experts, scientists, politicians and representatives of numerous NGOs discussed the fragile media freedom and Best Practices in South East Europe from 16 to 18 October 2014 in Skopje. The current media war on the conflict in Ukraine was a special topic of interest.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO) and the Central European Initiative (CEI) further extended the South East Europe Media Forum as the biggest media conference of the region. 300 media representatives, leading experts and top-ranking politicians came to Skopje in order to discuss the difficult situation of the media in different countries of the region. Christian Spahr, Head of the Media Program South East Europe of KAS, Oliver Vujović, General Secretary of SEEMO, and Giovanni Caracciolo di Vietri, General Secretary of CEI, opened the conference.

Dialogue between journalists and the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs

An animated panel discussion with Nikola Poposki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia, took place in the context of the opening session of the conference. He emphasised the role of EU integration for the future development of the country. In the Q&A session, journalists and media experts mentioned the case of Macedonian journalist Tomislav Kezarovski, who was sentenced to four and a half years of prison under questionable circumstances. The

court decision had caused international protests and debates about media freedom in Macedonia. Minister Poposki stressed out that he doesn't want to interfere into the work of the courts. After the South East Europe Media Forum, Christian Mihr, the head of "Reporters Without Borders" (RWB) in Germany, published another appeal demanding the release of Kezarovski, together with the media association n-ost.

Johann Wadephul (CDU), Member of the German Bundestag and its Foreign Affairs Committee, emphasised the meaning of media freedom and diversity of opinions for a successful integration of the South East European countries into the EU.

Main topics of the South East Europe Media Forum 2014 were the right of access to governmental information, the working conditions of investigative reporters and models for a successful self-regulation in the sector. Speakers amongst others were Christian Mihr (RWB), the Bosnian investigative journalist Miranda Patrucić and Flip Voets, Ombudsman of the Flemish Press Council in Belgium.

Parts of the panel discussions were organised in cooperation with UNESCO and the media network SEENPM, who merged another annual media conference into the South East Europe Media Forum. Most of the debates were presented by international experts such as Helen Darbishire, founder of media NGO Access Info Europe, or Michael Martens, Frankfurter Allgemeine daily (FAZ) correspondent for South East Europe.

Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

A lively discussion on the media war in Ukraine took place in the afternoon of the second conference day. It was moderated by Christian Spahr, Head of KAS Media Program South East Europe. Introductory statements were given by the former Slovenian President Danilo Türk as well as Boris Bergant, SEEMO board member and consultant of the European Broadcasting Union. Christian Mihr from RWB gave the keynote speech. According to his assessment, the difficult working conditions of journalists could lead towards a further deterioration of media freedom in Russia and Ukraine. Mihr, who is the co-author of a study on media strategies of the Kremlin, portrayed the situation of the few independent media in Russia and gave examples for biased depictions of the Ukraine crisis on the Russian state television.

Debate on media war in Ukraine crisis

Roman Skrypin, founder of the independent Ukrainian online television channel Hromadske, described the medial pressure coming from Moscow from a Ukrainian perspective. Denis Kazanskyi, investigative journalist from Donetsk, explained that it is almost impossible for critical reporters to openly do their work in areas occupied by the separatists. As a representative of an official Russian media outlet, Ivan Rodionov, Editor-in-chief of the video agency Ruptly, participated in the debate. The journalist known from German television talk shows criticized a general deterioration of journalistic quality. The experts on the podium – among them also Gudrun Gutt from the public broadcaster ORF in Vienna – were discussing very lively with the audience, but as expected, no consensus could be reached about Russia and its role of a media agent.

At the occasion of the media forum, the "CEI SEEMO Award for Investigative Journalism" was committed. SEEMO Secretary General Oliver Vujović, the Alternate Secretary General of CEI, Ambassador Margit Wästfelt, and Christian Spahr awarded the Serbian investigative journalist Brankica Stanković and the young professionals Sadeta Fišić, Jovana Kljajić

and Maida Salkanović from Bosnia-Herzegovina. A special mention was assigned to Ukrainian reporter Anna Babinets, who did research on corruption in Ukraine and reported from the Euromaidan protests in Kiev.

Balkanmedia – new online platform for media experts in South East Europe

During the South East Europe Media Forum a new online platform for journalists and media experts was launched – „Balkanmedia". The portal was initiated and implemented by the Media Program South East Europe of KAS and supported by its partners in order to better introduce their regional activities in the fields of media freedom and political communication on the internet. The different sections of the website, such as latest media news, publications, an event calendar as well as an interactive "Media Map", were presented by Christian Spahr.

Organisers and participants were in complete agreement that the South East Europe Media Forum is gaining further importance as the biggest media event in the region. The conference attracted the interest of the media and a lot of attention on social networks. The organisers announced Bucharest as event venue in 2015.