

Media in South East Europe: Reporting in times of crisis

THE "SOUTH EAST EUROPE MEDIA FORUM" IN BELGRADE BROUGHT TOGETHER 350 JOURNALISTS, MEDIA EXPERTS AND POLITICIANS FROM 20 COUNTRIES

Media makers must professionally deal with crises – those in politics and those in their own industry. Quality journalism in times of crisis was the theme of the tenth "South East Europe Media Forum" (SEEMF) on the 21st and 22nd of November in Belgrade. At the largest media conference media in the region 440 specialists discussed, among other topics, the refugee crisis, war reporting and the training of young journalists in changing circumstances. Serbia's Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić spoke at the opening.

The event was opened by **Christian Spahr**, Director of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, and **Oliver Vujović**, Secretary General of the South East European Media Organisation (SEEMO). "This forum is a platform for exchange about what we can improve with common forces. Informing citizens in a better way and creating high professional standards – these are two main themes of this conference", Spahr said. An additional co-host was the Central European Initiative (CEI), based in Trieste.

The Swiss Ambassador to Serbia, **Philippe Guex**, also spoke during the official opening. "Journalists in South East Europe are working under difficult conditions", he said. The European Commission (EC) had drawn attention to the increasing restriction of media freedom in the region. Reports of the Commission made important recommendations, for example on avoiding political influence on the media and implementing media legislation. The Swiss Ambassador made clear that journalists

themselves bear the responsibility for professional ethics. Informal networks like SEEMF were of particular importance in this respect, in reflecting on the problems of the industry.

Andrea Orizio, Head of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, said that first victim of every crisis was the truth. Journalists nowadays had little time to analyse the context and to present a broad view of events. CEI Secretary General **Giovanni Caracciolo di Vietri** emphasised the importance of investigative reporting for the further development of democracy in countries in transition.

The Head of the KAS Office for Serbia and Montenegro, **Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes**, underlined the role of the media for democracy and the significance of professional networks: "SEEMF is making an important contribution to professionalisation of the media in South East Europe."

Radomir Ličina, SEEMO representative in Belgrade, commented that the conditions for independent journalism in South East Europe continue to deteriorate and the media in the region face difficult challenges.

Keynote by the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić on the opening day

Among other matters, the Serbian Prime Minister **Aleksandar Vučić** talked about the refugee crisis, one of the main themes of this year's conference. Vučić noted that the number of refugees had reduced. There was a good cooperation with the Bulgarian and

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
MANUELA ZLATEVA

November 2016

www.kas.de/medien-europa/en

Turkish authorities in controlling the borders. The Prime Minister spoke in favour of stronger cooperation with neighbouring countries such as Albania. A further topic of his speech was the activities of the Serbian Government in the field of the media, including legislation for freedom of information and the privatisation of media. Vučić was emphatic that he and his Government were open to dialogue with the media makers. In response to questions, Vučić answered international correspondents on matters of domestic and foreign policy.

Challenges for the Serbian media: dialogue with politicians and their own standards

On the first day of the SEEMF conference there is traditionally a debate over the relationship between media and politics in the respective host country. **Oliver Vujović** led the discussion. **Dragan Janjić**, Editor in Chief of the news agency BETA and Vice-President of the Association of Independent Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), said that political influence on the media in Serbia was extensive and media content was dictated by the country's elites. The conditions for independent media were worsening and a good framework did not exist for dialogue between producers of media and politicians. In addition, there was little transparency in the ownership structures of the media in Serbia. In this regard, **Ljiljana Smajlović**, the President of the Serbian journalists organisation UNS, commented that editorial bodies and editors were not able to work with sufficient autonomy. She added that journalists in Serbia were inadequately paid.

Ivan Cvejić, Editor in chief of the Serbian weekly paper *Expres*, thought politics and the media were equally called upon to take action to improve conditions: "We have a general problem in our industry – the lack of independence of the Serbian media. Despite the efforts of the Government, nothing changes." According to **Gordana Janković**, head of the media department of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, citizens have very little trust in the media. There were too

many media in Serbia which could not exist without financial assistance from the state.

Veran Matić, Chief Executive Officer of the TV station B92 and Chair of the Commission for the Investigation of Murders of Journalists, said that threats against journalists had increased. Other representatives of TV stations and print media expressed critical views of the relationship between journalists and politicians.

In a further keynote address, **Franco Frattini**, former Italian Foreign Minister and EU Commissioner and currently President of the Chamber of the Italian Supreme Administrative Court, emphasised the key role which Serbia has to play in the stability of South East Europe. Access of the public to information and investigative journalism was of particular significance for progressive development in politics and the media. Journalists had to be protected against personal attacks, for example, when reporting from areas in crisis.

Journalists from Albania and Belarus win CEI SEEMO Awards

The first day of the conference was followed by the presentation of the "CEI SEEMO Award for Outstanding Merits in Investigative Journalism." **Lindita Çela**, an investigative journalist at BIRN Albania, was distinguished for her courageous researches on organised crime and corruption. **Artsiom Harbatsevich** from Belarus won the prize in the category "Young Journalists" for his reporting on pro-Russian paramilitary groups in Belarus. **Iurie Sănduță**, Director of RISE Moldova and member of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), received a special mention for his researches on cross-border corruption. KAS media expert Christian Spahr, who had been involved in the work of the jury, commented: "With this Award, CEI, SEEMO and KAS are showing that investigative research can influence political debate and other journalists benefit from the experience of the prize winners."

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
 MANUELA ZLATEVA

November 2016

www.kas.de/medien-europa/en

The first panel on the second day of the conference was devoted to the refugee crisis. The discussion concerned how European media could report about migration without preconceived opinions. The South East Europe correspondent of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, **Michael Martens**, argued that facts and terminologies in reporting were insufficiently tested and a better distinction had to be made between terms like “refugees” and “migrants”. Media enterprises should work together more closely in their reporting. Since most journalists were generalists, greater efforts were necessary to report concrete issues in more detail. According to **Henrik Kaufholz**, Chairman of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom in Leipzig, reporters had to learn how they can make correct use of social networks and identify falsehoods in them. Journalists from Greece, Italy and Macedonia also took part in the discussion, which was moderated by **Andreas Ernst**, Balkan correspondent of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung. He saw a responsible role of the media as the basis for an unbiased perception of the refugees.

War reporting as challenge for the media

Current developments in conflict reporting were a further theme of the conference. This included, among other aspects, how reporters in areas of armed conflict can adequately protect themselves. In the context of the panel, a new KAS expert book was presented with recommendations for war reporters. The authors of the publication and discussants included **Christian Mihr**, Managing Director of Reporters Without Borders, Germany, **Kurt Pelda**, a war reporter from Zurich, and **Ruslan Trad**, an editor of the Bulgarian media platform “KlinKlin”. **Tom Law**, Communications Manager of the Ethical Journalism Network in London, said that many reporters go into areas of crisis naively and without appropriate preparation. “Media outlets have the responsibility for young journalists, to ensure that they are properly prepared”, said Law.

Emre Kizilkaya, Digital Coordinator of the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet, said that Turkey was not a war zone as such, but there were parts of the country which were affected by conflicts and were dangerous. For media concerns, it was difficult to cover a broad diversity of conflicts. Good resource management and above all good journalism were essential.

Students demand more practical training in universities

The third panel was devoted to training of journalists in South East Europe. **Andreas Wolfers**, Head of the Henri Nannen School in Hamburg, led the discussion. **Viktorija Car** from the University of Zagreb and **Miroљjub Radojković** from the University of Belgrade presented a survey of students in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Rumania on studying journalism. The investigation provided the basis for a new KAS book presented during the SEEMF, with recommendations for education of journalists in the region. According to this study, half of the students decided to study journalism on idealistic grounds. At any rate, only one in two of them actually wants to work as a journalist on completing their studies. The students were critical of the technical facilities of their universities. The same was true about the practical modules of their course of study. Miroљjub Radojković was convinced that the numbers of students had to be reduced, as an effective practical training was possible only in smaller groups. He called for a dialogue between all actors – media outlets, ministries of education and universities – to achieve sustainable reforms. According to **Gena Traikova**, Head of News of the Bulgarian television station bTV, young graduates frequently have good expert knowledge but no practical experience. Particularly in times of multimedia, students needed more practical training. **Bertrand Pecquerie**, Chairman of the Global Editors Network, introduced the perspective of the market into the discussion. He supported the view that increasingly the media market would not be looking for students of journalism but IT experts, who would be provided with the relevant professional journalism knowledge

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
 MANUELA ZLATEVA

November 2016

www.kas.de/medien-europa/en

within the media outlets. In future there would be as many computer specialists as journalists working in the media. The editorial activity of the future was online and the only technical equipment journalists would need soon was their smartphone.

Ljiljana Zurovac, Executive Director of the Press Council in Bosnia-Herzegovina, emphasised the necessity that students should be taught professional and ethical standards. This would always remain important, also in times of digitalisation. Gena Traikova said that not only technology but also soft skills make good journalism. "A good story teller always has a public", according to Traikova.

Spokespersons of governments should act in the interests of citizens

A further expert panel considered the relationship between journalists and press officers, the main issues discussed being trust and transparency. Christian Spahr, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, led the discussion. **Erik den Hoedt**, Head of the Information Service of the Ministry of General Affairs of the Netherlands, said that governments and public authorities were increasingly losing the confidence of their citizens. He stressed that spokespersons and governments should not act in the interests of individual politicians but in the interests of the citizens. "Democracy is not a game. Anyone who does not take this to heart can only end up losing." The Government of the Netherlands had consequently introduced a code of principles for press spokespersons.

Hans-Jörg Vehlewald, Chief Political Reporter of BILD, emphasised that democracy needed powerful media and independent journalists. It was nevertheless legitimate that politicians, ministries and NGOs talk to journalists to provide information on a topic. If it was a matter of public interest, this could serve as a starting point for further research. **Aleksandra Bogdani**, an investigative reporter at BIRN Albania, complained about the lack of clear lines of separation between the work of press spokespersons and journalists in her country. **Ivan Lovreček**, Editor in Chief of RTL Croatia, said that PR experts of

governments still act mostly in the interests of individual politicians. He therefore kept a certain distance from spokespersons dealing with the press, to maintain professional standards and avoid the temptation to perform mutual favours. According to **Thomas Scholl**, Head of the Press Department of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, a good relationship between journalists and spokes-personnel is of mutual interest if it is based on professional standards. Press spokespersons must give journalists background information as appropriate without preconceived interpretations, said Schnöll.

Next SEEMF Conference expected in November 2017 in Sofia

Concluding speeches were given by **Dr. Erhard Busek**, Chairman of the Board of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM), **Roksanda Ninčić**, Political Director in the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Jelena Elčija**, a diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bosnia-Herzegovina (on behalf of CEI), in addition to **Oliver Vujović** (SEEMO) and **Christian Spahr** (KAS). The conference was followed and commented with great interest over Twitter and Facebook. The KAS Media Program South East Europe and its partners have announced that the next meeting will take place in Sofia. The expected date for the 11th South East Europe Media Forum is 27-29 November 2017.

With the collaboration of Darija Fabijanić

Translation from German: Dr. Alan Brier



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

Imprint

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
 Media Program
 South East Europe

19, Konrad Adenauer St.
 1st floor, apt. 2
 1504 Sofia
 Bulgaria

Telephone
 +359 2 942 49-71
 Telefax
 +359 2 942 49-79

E-Mail
media.europe@kas.de

Web
www.kas.de/medien-europa