

## PR experts recommend: First strategy, then tactics

PARTY SPOKESPERSONS AND PR MANAGERS FROM SOUTH EAST EUROPE DISCUSS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION UPON INVITATION OF THE KAS MEDIA PROGRAM

**How can new supporters be mobilised? How are election campaigns being evaluated? What are new PR trends? To answer these questions, the KAS Media Program South East Europe brought together party spokespersons from nine countries as well as PR experts from Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands. The workshop took place in Cadenabbia from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2016.**

Important political decisions are currently made in South East Europe. Croatia has a new prime minister; new presidents were elected in Bulgaria and Moldova. Furthermore, parliamentary elections are being held in Macedonia in December. In this context the KAS Media Program enhances political communication and provides a platform for exchange between spokespersons.

**Christian Spahr**, Head of the KAS Media Program, commented that the trust of citizens in political communication is low in the region. This was confirmed by opinion polls of the Media Program in Bulgaria and Romania. Spahr presented new findings of a survey on PR organisation and PR strategies done among representatives of political parties in South East Europe. The centre-right parties are mostly using TV and online media for their public relations. All party leaders have a Facebook account and three out of four use Twitter for spreading political messages. However, only every second party leader has a spokesperson who is giving official statements in his or her

name. In many cases top politicians reserve TV interviews for themselves.

### Effective mobilisation of party members and voters

Developing a political message and addressing it to different target groups is a challenge – not only in South East Europe, explained **Ralf Gülden-zopf**, Head of Department of Political Communication of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. “Different target groups need to be distinguished and correctly addressed,” said Gülden-zopf. He shared his experiences with door-to-door election campaigns of the CDU in Germany. A good preparation and an active participation of volunteers are important. Gülden-zopf emphasised that through personal communication trust among voters can be built and votes are being secured. “Use open registers and public databases to become familiar with the media habits of your target group,” recommended Gülden-zopf. A clear message regarding individual needs of the citizens should be part of every good political strategy.

“A campaign is storytelling with a purpose,” said **Alex Aiken**, Executive Director of UK Government Communications, introducing the topic of strategic communication planning and setting up campaign objectives. A campaign must be understood as a “planned sequence of communications and interactions that uses a compelling narrative over time to deliver a defined and measurable outcome”. Key for strategic communication is to know and mobilise your

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audience. "Get a realistic picture of your voters," emphasised Aiken. In the first place shall be developed a strategy followed by tactics. The participants practiced the principles of strategic planning interactively in small groups by developing step by step organisation, topics, plan and tactics of a sample campaign.

Upon the request of the participants, Aiken elaborated on PR evaluation in his last presentation. Evaluation is a key element for staying credible in the long term. The results are not only improving future campaigns, but also help to make internal communication more effective. Written results of evaluations can be used for future strategic decisions, commented Aiken.

#### **"Framing" in political communication**

How language can be effectively used by political "framing" was explained by **Dr Hans de Bruijn**, Professor in Public Administration/Organisation and Management at the Delft University of Technology. Participants learned how politicians frame their opponents in debates and how they can react to frames of others. Rhetorical provocations require an answer outside the given frame, explained Bruijn. Thereby, losing credibility can be avoided. De Bruijn introduced several models of frames with examples from international politics *inter alia* of Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel and Margaret Thatcher.

The selection of topics as well as the practical advice of the lecturers received a highly positive response by participants. They expressed interest in participating in further workshops to make their communication even more citizen-oriented. The KAS Media Program South East Europe will offer equivalent trainings in 2017.



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