

Welcoming speech

Crises require more communication

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Dear Minister Abrashi,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues and friends,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to Sofia. More than 60 experts in the fields of government communications and public diplomacy are gathering here today. Representatives of 15 countries have come together to discuss a better communication with citizens and within Europe as a whole.

Both the SEECOM association and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung have high expectations towards this meeting, because the challenges we are facing are particularly high. Better political communication in Europe and better communication with citizens: we all know that this is desperately needed, when we switch on our TV.

One of SEECOM's main goals is to strengthen professional communication on European integration affairs. How can neighbour states learn from each other and speak with one voice? How can we make the EU understandable to the people? What are the benefits of cooperation in comparison to isolation? These questions have become most concrete in the refugee crisis. We will take this example to develop ideas about a better dialogue between countries, institutions and citizens.

This meeting is also about how politicians can improve the public image of their dialogue with citizens. Political communication is seen very critically by the electorate. In Bulgaria, 63 percent of the population think that politicians inform the citizens rather badly. In Romania, even 72 percent. We have conducted these representative polls only nine months ago. In both countries, a large number of citizens also think that politicians need to improve their dialogue on the Internet.

But there is another important aspect. In critical situations, governments need to invest in communication. Crises do require more communication. This also means a high scope of responsibilities for PR experts in public institutions. In a multi-channel and cross-media environment, even the most popular politicians need strong communication teams. They cannot do PR just with gut instinct. SEECOM is also about strengthening the professional profiles of media spokespersons and about using their strategic advice in policymaking.

A better dialogue between countries and with citizens, better working conditions for communication managers – these are good reasons for Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung to support SEECOM. Today's agenda is very promising. We have gathered many leading experts. I am looking forward to lively debates and a fruitful exchange.

I wish you all an exciting and pleasant SEECOM 2015 conference.

Thank you for being here, and for your attention.