

Welcome note SEEMF 2015

Quality journalism in times of crises

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues and Friends,

A very warm welcome on behalf of the Media Program of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Hosting the South East Europe Media Forum means: Bringing together most leading journalists, media decision makers and experts in our region. 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. They are important in the light of increasing changes in an ever more complex political environment.

2016 has been a year of crises, even more than previous years: Brexit, terror in France, the attempted coup in Turkey and its consequences, and uncertainty about the political course of the USA. Wars in Ukraine and Syria are destabilising Europe and its neighbourhood, and migration is a major challenge. Nationalism is on the rise, open societies are in a defensive position.

Many countries in South East Europe have to make fundamental decisions on the direction: More or less EU integration? Pro-Western or pro-Russian? Liberal democracy or strong state?

In this context, quality journalism is particularly important. Well-informed citizens are needed in order to make conscious political choices. With experts from Serbia, its neighbour states, the German-speaking countries, Italy and others, we will scrutinise the current state of media and present best practises and ideas for reform. The refugee crisis and conflict reporting are only two examples for tomorrow's thematic panels. There's also opportunity to ask whether young journalists are being well prepared for a more competitive, less stable and safe work environment – and for the needs of a rapidly changing media market.

According to many indicators, the global conditions for professional journalism are worsening: Markets are becoming dysfunctional, media freedom is under pressure by authoritarian political models, and more journalists are being attacked or killed during their work, especially in conflict zones. Bigger efforts have to be made to obtain and maintain independent, diverse and professional media landscapes – also against the competition by social media that influence opinion making using algorithms, only showing us what our friends think. These are international trends, and many of them concern us in South East Europe, too.

Surprisingly enough, journalism is still a dream job for many, according to a survey done by a KAS Task Force among journalism students in South East Europe. But only half of them estimate to stay in journalism after graduation. We will hear more about the reasons tomorrow. The panels on journalism education and conflict reporting will also give us an opportunity to present two newly printed expert books; some of the authors are amongst us.

Last but not least, we need to examine the relations between journalists and spokespersons. Is it possible to benefit from cooperation while respecting high professional and ethical standards? An important question, yet not often enough discussed.

Our agenda would look less promising without the friendly and very professional support of my colleague Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes and his team in Belgrade. The KAS Serbia office and the Swiss Embassy are inviting us to the dinner reception after the opening ceremony. I will give the word to Norbert now and wish you all a highly interesting and inspiring conference. Thank you very much for your attention.