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Public broadcasting as main focus of study trip to Germany

Journalists and managers from public broadcasters in South East Europe visited Berlin and Hamburg from 6 to 10 May 2019.

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The Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organised in cooperation with the Domestic Programme Division of the KAS a study trip for journalists and managers from public broadcasters to Germany. In Berlin and Hamburg, the participants coming from the ten countries targeted by the Media Programme gained insights into the functioning of public service media in Germany, the German media landscape as well as current aspects of domestic and foreign policy. In exchange with German colleagues, the group discussed the independence and financing of public service media, technological developments in the media sector and journalism education.

Public service broadcasting plays an important role in the media landscape as it is often the first source of information for citizens – at least in Germany. In a democratic society it is within the responsibility of public service media to make programme decisions which are beneficial for the users, regardless of political or commercial considerations. But this is not the case everywhere in the world. Not only public service media but the entire sector is facing major challenges – due to competitive, financial or political reasons. Since Germany is often considered point of orientation for South East Europe not only in terms of its political but also its journalistic work, the study visit to Berlin and Hamburg had the goal to introduce the German media system, in particular public service media.

First stop was the “Haus des Rundfunks” in Berlin

The first part of the visit was the public broadcaster for Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb). **Hendrik Sittig**, head of the KAS Media Programme, welcomed the guests from South East Europe, presented the work of the Media Programme and gave a short introduction on the topics of the study visit. Afterwards, a discussion with the ARD General Secretary **Dr Susanne Pfab** took place. She gave a brief overview of the history of public service broadcasting in Germany and the structure of the ARD, the Working Group of Public Broadcasters of the Federal Republic of Germany. Pfab explained that the decentralized structure, the composition of supervisory bodies and the funding through license fees contribute to political independence and enable the fulfillment of the mandate.

Dr Jan Schulte-Kellinghaus, Programme Director at rbb, illustrated how television, radio programmes and online editors work together and create joint projects. In terms of multimedia work, the rbb is a pioneer in the ARD. During the conversation with participants, the topic of the influence of the broadcasting council on the pro-

gramme was brought up. Schulte-Kellinghaus emphasised: "The Broadcasting Council does not tell us what we should report on. It merely consults." This was confirmed the following morning by the Chairwoman of the rbb Broadcasting Council, Pastor **Friederike von Kirchbach**: "We do not interfere with their autonomy. We criticize and commend in hindsight"



Conversation with the members of the rbb Broadcasting Council Friederike von Kirchbach and Dieter Piekny.

Dieter Piekny, Deputy Chairman of the Broadcasting Council and Chairman of the Programme Committee, also took part in the meeting. He explained that the Broadcasting Council is only to a small extent filled with political representatives and should represent a cross-section of the population. That is why environmental organisations, churches, women's associations and many other socially relevant organisations are sending representatives to the 30-member Council. This mandate is linked to the clear order not to act on behalf of the sending organisation but in the interest of the population.

Day 2 was devoted to press freedom

After a guided tour through the rbb building, the next stop was the Federal Press Conference (“Bundespressekonferenz”). Chairman **Dr Gregor Mayntz** explained the unique concept of the Federal Press Conference to the journalists from South East Europe – as it has nothing to do with the Federal Government or with the Federal Press Office. The Federal Press Conference is a

registered association of over 900 German journalists who report full-time on federal politics. "In a country with press freedom why should the government decide who attends a government press conference and when it takes place?", Mayntz provocatively asked, reminding the guests of the journalists' role as watchdogs. Subsequently, the participants went to the State Ministry of Culture and Media to speak among others with **Maren Hohensträter** from the Department for International Media Cooperation. In this talk, the distance of the state that makes the work of media possible in the first place was once again emphasised. Other topics of the discussion were e.g. the work of Deutsche Welle, the Network Enforcement Act or the EU Directive on audiovisual media.

In the evening there was a discussion with **Gemma Pörzgen** from Reporters without Borders about the global situation of press freedom and the current ranking of Reporters Without Borders.

Political talks were also held

The third day of the trip was devoted to media legislation and politics. **Prof Johannes Weberling**, media lawyer and professor of media law at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), explained the legal situation of the public service media which is organised federally through State Public Broadcasting Treaties. "In order to prevent governments from capturing public service media, the Federal Constitutional Court controls and corrects. Influence is thereby rejected", said Weberling.

In the following conversation with **Frank Priess**, Deputy Head of the Department of European and International Cooperation of the KAS, the group got to know the work of the foundation better; further topics were migration and demographic change as well as the preparations for the European elections in Germany. This resulted in an intense debate on current challenges in Europe, including relations to the Western Balkans.

After a lunch with **Daphne Wolter**, Media Policy Officer at KAS, who introduced the German media system to the participants, they went to the ZDF capital studio. After a brief tour of the television studios, the group discussed the journalistic work from Berlin and about the EU with **Shakuntala Banerjee**, Deputy Studio director and previously ZDF correspondent in Brussels.

Part of the further programme was devoted to foreign policy. **Matthias Lüttenberg**, Head of Unit for Central, Eastern and South East Europe in the Federal Chancellery, emphasised the joint



Participants visiting the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and having a lively discussion with Frank Priess.

uptake of EU accession talks with Albania and Northern Macedonia as a key goal of German foreign policy in the Western Balkans. He also gave some insights into the debates at the Western Balkan Conference that took place a few days earlier in Berlin and was organised by the Federal Chancellery in cooperation with the French government.

Visit of NDR in Hamburg

At the end of the trip, the group went to Hamburg to visit the Northern German Broadcasting (NDR,) and the Tagesschau editorial office. Discussion partner was **Dr Burkhard Nagel**, Quality Manager at ARD-aktuell, who also led the tour

through the editorial department. He talked about the shift from linear to non-linear television. For the Tagesschau, this ultimately meant that more editorial parts were added, namely online and social media. However, he said that television use has not declined. Other topics of the talk with Nagel included fact-checking, news creation and journalism education at the NDR.

The participants gave very positive feedback at the end of the journey. The Bosnian participant

welcomed the fact that she was able to broaden her knowledge about public service broadcasting and its challenges and said she was taking home many ideas for improving her own work and journalism education. This positive feedback motivates the KAS Media Programme South East Europe to continue organising such study visits for journalists in the future in cooperation with the Domestic Programmes Division.



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