



## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

In a democracy, the media fulfil fundamental functions. They provide information and commentary, initiate public debate, and thereby contribute to transparency and diversity of opinion. They should report independently and present an accurate and reliable image of reality to allow the country's citizens to form their own opinions about social and political issues. With this remit, the media represent an indispensable part of any liberal democracy, or said more succinctly: no democracy without free and independent media. The degree of freedom of the press and of opinion also always indicates the progress a country has made in terms of democratisation.

Lately, the political upheavals in North Africa and in Myanmar have demonstrated the close correlation between the media and democracy. When the Myanmar government announced the end of press censorship in August 2012 after 50 years of military dictatorship, this was seen as an important step towards a political opening up and the democratisation of the Southeast Asian country. The media were pervaded by a general sense of being on the brink of a new departure. In the case of the democratic movements in the countries of the "Arab Spring", social media played a crucial role in mobilising citizens and became established as the mouthpiece of the younger population. Images and information about the mass protests were disseminated via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, partly in real time, enabling the global public to experience the upheavals virtually first hand.

The degree of independence and freedom enjoyed by the media differs greatly depending on the prevailing political and economic conditions of the particular country. There are only very few countries around the world where the state of press freedom can be described as satisfactory. The exertion of influence by governments, which restrict the

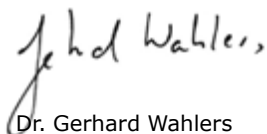
work of journalists by various means ranging up to censorship, has been joined by economic interests and dependence on advertising customers as well as an increasing concentration of media providers, all of which are endangering plurality of opinion and media independence.

Media consumers are also becoming aware of these developments. One could speak of a "crisis of confidence" when examining the results of a current representative study, which the KAS Media Program South East Europe commissioned for Bulgaria and Romania. According to this study, 60 per cent of Bulgarians deny that the media are independent. Only 14 per cent are confident that the reporting in their country is free. In Romania, citizens gave a similarly devastating assessment of their media. There, a mere 20 per cent of respondents believe in the independence of the media. Newspapers are the most important source of information for only seven per cent. Christian Spahr, Director of the KAS Media Program, concluded that to remain relevant to people and to hold their own against the competition from television and the Internet, newspapers have to make consistent efforts to pursue quality.

Although the era of digital communication brings many opportunities, it also entails new challenges for the classic media. Online news sites and social media have entered the field as additional sources of information besides the traditional information providers. To many people, particularly the young, the Internet has become the most important medium. While newspaper publishers in Europe and North America have experienced the impact of this development in the form of drastic drops in advertising revenue for some time, the Asian newspaper industry has the Internet revolution yet to come. In his article in this issue, Torben Stephan examines the consequences that this will have for the media landscape in Asia.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung believes in the following principle: anybody who wishes to support democratisation processes must also support the development of free and independent media. Encouraging freedom of the press and of opinion therefore represents a constant aspect of our work. With our three regional media programs, whose directors report in the current issue, we promote the raising

of journalists' qualifications, improvement of the political communication skills of politicians and parties, and the establishment of legal and ethical standards for journalists. With these efforts, we make a contribution to ensuring that the media can perform their important functions in democracy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Gerhard Wahlers," with a stylized initial "G" and a comma at the end.

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Deputy Secretary General

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