

PROMOTING FREE MEDIA

THE MEDIA PROGRAMME OF THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG¹

Free and independent media are indispensable for the promotion of democracy. In a modern society, they fulfil a number of important functions, such as spreading information at all levels of the state and society, conducting public debates, launching ideas, rendering decisions transparent, voicing criticism, and calling decision-makers to account. Thus, the media enable citizens both to participate in the policy-making process and to form their own opinions, which is crucial in a democracy. By the same token, they influence and monitor the outcomes of the political, social, and economic development of the state. This being so, democratic framework conditions may only evolve successfully if the media sector is promoted and enhanced in an ongoing process. This is why promoting freedom of opinion and the media plays an outstanding part in the international cooperation activities of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Today as in the past, the picture presented by the state of the media in many countries is by no means uniform. Mirroring differences in levels of political and economic development, the degree of freedom and independence enjoyed by the media fluctuates as widely as before. For this reason, the process of democratisation remains predicated on constant and effective support for the media in their endeavour to secure greater freedom of action as well as professional integrity. This is where the media programme of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung comes in. Besides promoting the media under the national programmes for individual countries, the KAS operates a separate media programme which, managed by media experts, is dedicated exclusively to promoting the media in Latin America, Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and southeast Europe.

THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA PROGRAMME OF THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung adapts its media-related activities to the specific consultation needs of each and every region and country in the world. Still, our experience with project developments in the various regions suggests that the deficits to be found in the media sector are the same everywhere. The resultant need for action is embodied in four overarching long-range objectives:

- Enhancing quality and qualification in journalism
- Ensuring free, responsible, and ethically-founded reporting
- Creating and extending journalistic networks on the national and regional plane
- Improving the political communication of politicians and parties

To reach these objectives, the KAS has instituted related measures in all its four regions.

1. Enhancing journalistic quality and qualification

Many journalists are inadequately trained, lacking professional knowledge despite many years of experience. Targeted in-service training and information programmes addressing current political, economic, and societal issues provide media representatives with any technical knowledge they may lack, enabling them at the same time to furnish society with the information it needs in order to get its bearings in an ever more complex world, in a manner that is both understandable and tailored to the needs of the audience. In addition to enhancing the quality of reporting, this serves to strengthen the media in their role of controlling political, economic, and societal forces within the political structure.

Next to defective professional knowledge, it is often found that information about the journalistic trade itself is lacking. Training courses on investigative journalism enable media representatives to cope better with the complexities of background research and to report on abuses more competently. Applying the methods of investigative journalism permits the media to fulfil their function as guardians in society.

To improve their training, moreover, journalists need to be informed about their own rights and obligations. However, many media workers in the various regions have no more than rudimentary knowledge about these matters, and some have none at all. Targeted courses inform journalists about their rights and obligations as well as about the media law in their respective home countries, enabling them to claim their rights and fulfil their duties.

2. Ensuring free, responsible, and ethically-founded reporting

Furthermore, freedom and accountability in journalism depend on the creation of ethical criteria, such as editorial statutes, and their widespread acceptance. If ethical standards are in place and compliance with them is monitored by self-governing bodies, independent, careful, comprehensive, truthful, and unimpeachable reporting will be underpinned, enhancing the credibility of the media.

Regarding media self-organisation, Germany has a variety of interesting models to offer, which were developed against the background of totalitarianism and national socialism. Public-law radio stations and the Federal Press Conference guarantee a basic supply of information as well as pluralism and constant institutionalised access to information. Together with some variants elsewhere in Europe, these models demonstrate the prerequisites for the development of an independent media landscape. Positive experiences are constantly introduced in the debate about creating a media system that is based on the fundamental democratic principles of remoteness from the state, programme diversity, and freedom of opinion.

3. Creating and extending journalistic networks at national and regional levels

Journalists only rarely maintain contacts with neighbouring countries. Lack of experience abroad diminishes their understanding for the problems of their neighbours. Because of its regional structure, the media programme of the KAS permits transnational measures which offer opportunities for making contacts with colleagues not only from the region in question but also from Germany and Europe. To the participants, the knowledge they acquire at international events is advantageous in many respects: Not only will journalists report more equitably on events in neighbouring countries, they will also be less susceptible to economic pressure if they hold contracts as foreign correspondents. Media companies, in turn, may learn from good examples set by other enterprises in the region and implement new ideas in their home countries. Lastly, a view across the border helps people to understand their neighbours' situation, thus preventing conflicts within the region. Furthermore, placing journalism on a regional footing is a prerequisite for pillorying abuses and creating an international audience within the region and beyond.

4. Improving the political communication of politicians and parties

Mastery in media competence is very important for the presentation of political matters in a democratic media society. In the regions where the KAS is active, parties and politicians often have nothing more than a relatively undeveloped system to communicate their political programmes to the population. Particularly in those countries where a single party is dominant or even all-powerful, this plays into the hands of the leaders. Citizens need information to arrive at democratic decisions. This is particularly important in the run-up to elections when political marketing and good campaign management are crucial for the communication of political ideas and concepts. This is why political communication forms one of the focal points of the media programme. Acquiring knowledge about political communication and campaign management enables people to present their own political objective in a contemporary manner which, in turn, reinforces democratic competition.

THE REGIONAL DIVISIONS OF THE MEDIA PROGRAMME

Latin America

In Latin America, the impact of the media is frequently unpredictable. Print products, radio programmes and, even more importantly, television exert a crucial influence on the opinions of the people. Particularly on television, emotional coverage may trigger immediate reactions. Dramatic reports may easily cause political or economic projects to be cancelled in short order, not least because either the country does not have much of a media culture where stories are checked against other sources by other journalists, or because those media outlets do not have the same influence as others that are more friendly towards the government. By staging emotional appearances on television, presidents can drive masses of people into the street to protest. Political demagogues find it easy to instrumentalise the power of the media because well-trained and well-informed journalists form an alarmingly small minority among the media population. This is why prophetic speeches by demagogic politicians are often reproduced uncritically in media reports or published without an explanatory context. Thus, journalists will report about campaigns without analysing the programmes of the candidates, or indeed without a proper understanding of the country's electoral system. Or again, they may report about disputes between warring parties, as in Colombia, without knowing the history of the armed conflict.

Moreover, the importance of the media ultimately depends on the way in which they are utilised in the various regions: papers are read only by elites and members of the upper middle class, particularly in major cities. Marginalised groups, such as indigenes and members of the lower social classes, mainly use (citizens') radio and a few television programmes, especially in the provinces. This is why small citizens' radio stations are so important in some areas. The actual importance of the media crucially depends on whether they operate in a monopolised media landscape (e.g. television in Mexico and the entire media sector in Venezuela) or greatly depend on government advertising, which tends to reinforce the trend towards servile reporting and self-censorship.

These deficits threaten the development of democracy in Latin America. What is more, there is a flagrant contradiction between the influence of the press and the broadcasting media on the one hand, and the inferior qualification of many journalists and the shaky economic independence of the media in Latin America on the other.

The KAS has been funding media projects in Latin America since the 1970s. Media promotion under a programme dedicated to the sector in Latin America goes back to the year 1993. Throughout the many years of its presence in the sector, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has amassed a hoard of experience and knowledge. Thanks to its promotion of the media in Latin America, the KAS today enjoys great trust and esteem everywhere. The focal points in its current programme are the product of an ongoing critical discourse about the media and political communication on the sub-continent. By focusing on these items, the KAS has been able to adjust to changing requirements and the swift development of the sector.

Today's focal issues reflect key problems and challenges. One example which illustrates the way in which objectives are updated without abandoning the necessary sustainability and continuity is the inclusion in the programme of the 'new media' and the resultant demands on media legislation. Another useful move that was implemented many years ago was to entrust only experienced journalists with the management of the various tasks.

Since the autumn of 2006, the media programme has been headquartered in Buenos Aires, enabling an intense exchange with local media experts and consultants who work in the international field. Today as always, the programme meets the growing demand for in-house measures in journalist training and education, media law and media policy, and political communication in all areas of relevance. Recently added to the range of tasks, the 'internet and new media' complex will be integrated into all segments of the regional programme. The internet platform that was created some three years ago to facilitate communication with our target groups without regard to space and time is constantly updated to meet current media requirements.

Asia

Because of the great differences that exist in the level of economic and political development in the various countries of Asia, it is well-nigh impossible to pin down any general trends in the state of the media. As ever, the freedom enjoyed by the national media differs greatly from one country to the next. A positive development could be witnessed in Nepal, where freedom of the press improved dramatically when the king was peacefully deprived of power in 2006. Once again, it was mainly the radio stations which supported the democratic idea. Cambodia, another country where the infrastructure is problematic, provides abundant evidence that radio is a tool whose importance for information and democratic opinion-forming should not be underrated. Consequently, there is considerable need for development-policy action to which the media programme for Asia is responding with its own means and measures.

Since its launch in 1996, the media programme for Asia has established itself as one of the most effective international partners in the Asian media sector. What is more, it is highly esteemed by journalists, politicians, academics, and representatives of civil society organisations. As the political and economic conditions prevailing in the countries of Asia are highly heterogeneous, the problems that exist are complex and demand medium to long-term strategies.

The range of subjects covered by the media programme is being constantly enlarged and adapted to its target groups. It now includes the issue of regional integration within ASEAN, the shifting geopolitical balance in the Asian region, inter-regional relations between the EU and ASEAN, the challenges to democracy and journalism posed by the new age of the media, media management, and competent journalistic reporting on issues such as religion, conflicts and terrorism, and media law.

Furthermore, the fact that presidents, heads of government, ministers, and other leading figures in public life readily agree to participate as keynote speakers in media programme events testifies to its growing profile and outreach. The Asian-European Editors' Forum, for example, which has been taking place in a different country every year since 2000, has been honoured with speeches by the presidents and/or heads of state of the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore.

The regional programme promotes a media landscape that is independent and committed to ethical and professional standards, thus stabilising and strengthening democratic structures in the countries of Asia. Consequently, programme activities concentrate on fostering dialogue among Asia's media representatives, exchanges of experts and journalists, and the process of harmonising professional and legal standards in the Asian media landscape. In addition, the programme focuses on supporting initiatives that aim to preserve journalistic diversity in the face of growing international media concentration and to reinforce independence, diversity, and professionalism in the local press.

In the field of Asian-European exchange, the above-mentioned Asian-European Editors' Forum has been particularly successful in establishing itself as a recognised platform of dialogue between publishers and editors from Asia and their German and/or European colleagues. On the one hand, the forum serves to create personal networks and enable participants to acquire more detailed knowledge about the host country of the moment; on the other, it facilitates professional exchanges about current issues of regional and supra-regional relevance.

In pursuit of the goal of intra-Asian cooperation, the Asian media programme established the Asia News Network (ANN) in 1999 to facilitate the exchange of news among its current membership of 16 papers, all holding a leading position in their respective countries of origin. Without parallel in Asia, the network is increasingly proving itself a medium of communication whose importance can hardly be overestimated. Founded on successful cooperation and coordination among its members, the ANN has been growing steadily in terms of membership, outreach, and the quality of its joint initiatives. During the previous promotion period, the ANN added to its portfolio of initiatives the creation of the ANN Business Group to develop its own sources of revenue together with the launch of two weekly publications, the ANN E-Paper and the AsiaNews magazine. Now that the Kathmandu Post (Nepal) and the Vientiane Times (Laos) have joined, the network has moved yet another step closer to its goal of regional inclusiveness.

Cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Asian Centre for Journalism (KAACfJ) at the renowned Ateneo University of Manila has been highly positive as well as effective. The centre's diploma and certificate courses, including a distance learning MA course in online journalism which it has been offering since 2004, contribute a great deal towards sustainably improving and professionalising the media in Asia. The programme appears particularly impressive because of the widespread and still-growing regional response to its curriculum, and because it brings the centre's Asian profile even better into focus. To safeguard the sustainability of the initiative, moreover, an alumni network complete with database has been created. Another new initiative is the Young Leaders' Forum to which mainly MA students at the KAACfJ are invited. One of its purposes is to facilitate networking.

Up-to-date publications of practical relevance are yet another way in which the Asian media programme attempts to guarantee the sustainability of its education and training measures for journalists. Among the publications that appeared in the current promotion period, the Asia Media Directory deserves to be highlighted because of the great demand which it provoked among journalists, editors, and academics. As the response to this publication was so widespread, the Media Programme for Asia is planning a reissue for the year 2008/09. Further highlights include Reporting Development News, a manual that aims to improve the understanding of development journalism in Asia; the first volume of the newly-launched Book Series in Asian Journalism, which contains articles on current challenges confronting journalists in Asia (written by graduates of the MA in journalism programme of the Konrad Adenauer Asian Centre for Journalism at the Ateneo University of Manila); and Covering Maritime Piracy in Southeast Asia, an introduction to responsible and informed reporting on this topical issue.

Sub-Saharan Africa

In operation since 2002, the media programme for sub-Saharan Africa focuses on South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya. Occasionally, education and consultation measures will be implemented in other countries of the region, and delegates from these countries may be invited to regional events.

A large proportion of the journalists working in the project region remain inadequately trained even after years of professional experience. On the one hand, the knowledge that surrounds the journalistic trade is either not taught at all or passed on by superiors without any thorough training of their own. The consequence is that fundamental errors are handed down from generation to generation. On the other hand, there is often a lack of specific knowledge about the subjects

covered. Thus, for example, journalists who report on press conferences of their country's ministry of economics may be unable to explain fundamental terms like inflation. At best, the resultant reports will be unreflected, but in most cases this is aggravated by mistakes and untruths. This is what the media programme has been focussing on since its inception. Because of the size of the region and the low level of knowledge that is widespread among media workers, some measures are accompanied by training courses for multipliers who pass on their newly-acquired knowledge to their colleagues.

The strength of the media programme results from its regional approach. Next to measures implemented in specific countries to address, for example, campaign coverage in the run-up to national elections, regional events are planned and implemented as well. This approach has proven extremely sound and successful. As a general rule, journalists working in the programme region do not have a chance to travel to a neighbouring country. Most know little about the countries next to their own. Regional measures may not only help to create mutual understanding, they also enable participants to gather best practices from other media houses for later application in their own editorial office. Moreover, international contacts make journalists less susceptible to reprisals by their own government because of the transboundary employment relationships that often develop in the course of time, such as correspondence contracts, for instance. Thus, the regional approach operates at several levels to improve the working conditions of the journalists and enhance the independence of their companies. This is most clearly evident whenever the managers of a company cooperate with its owners on developing financial strategies to strengthen their media house.

The legal framework conditions for free media similarly need improving. In the past, the media programme has implemented a variety of projects under this heading. The publication of handbooks on media law assists journalists and media houses in judging their own rights and obligations.

In 2006, the field of political communication was added to the regional programme. Its objective is to enable politicians to competently inform citizens about political processes and contents. Thus, a summer school is held to teach young representatives of political parties from southern Africa the skills they need to improve their communication.

In the early days of the media programme, it was assumed that the new-media sector would develop as swiftly in southern Africa as in Europe or Asia. Looking back, we find that this development did not materialise even in South Africa. It is true that the number of internet subscribers has been booming, and that data communication rates have improved markedly, but even so, the technical facilities available are far from adequate for operating further education within the region via the internet, for example. Moreover, it was found that although the influence of the new media on the market has been immense, their impact on the tasks and the work of journalists was not extensive enough to affect their everyday lives seriously. Even so, the media programme relies on the internet as a handy medium for communicating information across large distances and national borders.

The steps taken by the media programme for sub-Saharan Africa to consolidate the freedom of the media address one of the core problems of the countries within the project region as they aim to reinforce existing development potentials, to promote democratisation, and to develop together with local partners proposals on how to strengthen the generally weak position of the 'fourth branch of government'.

Guided by the goal of sustainable development cooperation, the key areas of the regional programme are based on an analysis of the framework conditions as well as the obstacles to and potentials of media development within the region. To secure the involvement of the target groups, the programme maintains a permanent dialogue with media representatives, political players, and partners within the region to discuss its objectives and measures. The media programme attempts to overcome the weakness of the media in the project countries in harmony with other international organisations. The programme's intended effect extends to two levels. At the first, the programme responds with education and consultation measures to the need for information and in-service

training of selected target groups. Project activities are tailored to these information and education needs. At the second level, the programme promotes the development of democracy within the region beyond the limits of its concrete activities. To achieve this indirect effect, tools and target groups are carefully selected for the programme. The effect of the activities is bound to spread because of the nature of the programme and its target groups, for these include without exception democratic forces of reform which act as multipliers. The key tools of the programme are systematic education and consultation measures as well as the development of training materials which may be used in measures other than those promoted by the KAS.

Southeast Europe

The sector project Media and Democracy in Southeast Europe has been operating from its own office in Sofia since 2007. It covers the constituent countries of the former Yugoslavia as well as Bulgaria and Rumania. Albania and the Republic of Moldova, two countries currently under observation, are regularly involved in regional events. When the programme was created, the contacts of the numerous KAS offices abroad proved very helpful. Thus, cooperation with representatives of media houses, journalists, journalist organisations, and universities in the region quickly acquired a high degree of quality and mutual trust, and the popularity of the programme grew rapidly.

The strong point of the regional programme is that it uses media promotion to develop and stabilise democracy as well as to foster the European idea in the region. Whereas other organisations, such as the OSCE, concentrate on protecting freedom of the press, the KAS media programme addresses not only improvements in the quality of the media but also the aspect of political communication. Moreover, the regional approach of the sector programme, which is designed to encourage networking and exchanges in southeast Europe, is unique at the moment.

To underpin processes of integration and cooperation in the region, the media programme strengthens the media sector as an important pillar of democratisation. The areas to which particular attention is paid include, among others, the training of journalists (especially specialisation in technical subjects) and ethical self-governance. It also aims to ensure that the subject of Europe is no longer described in abstract political terms but finds its way into all segments of society and into widely different milieus. All in all, the approach is designed to promote continuous improvements in the quality of journalism, a major contribution towards the reinforcement of democratic structures.

The Foundation's efforts to establish a media council in Croatia were very well received by the public and the media sector. Thanks to its support, the KAS is now regarded as a serious interlocutor for establishing organs of self-regulation.

There is still a very great demand for offers of specialisation as the training of southeast European journalists is largely confined to political, linguistic, and cultural studies. Learners are not taught the elementary methodology of journalism, and there is no specialisation. This has a highly negative impact on communication about the EU, a political subject that greatly exercises all southeast Europeans at the moment: People learn very little about the opportunities offered by the EU.

In addition to the difficult process of political and economic transformation they are passing through, the countries of southeast Europe have a hard time coping with the recent past. This is especially difficult against the background of the Yugoslavian war, which raged in the countries of the western Balkans from 1991–1995. Coming to terms with the socialist past while simultaneously overcoming the war years constitutes a double burden. Nor have the other countries succeeded in coming to terms with their communist legacy. To support this process, the KAS is running several projects, mostly of a legal nature. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the issue is of particularly great importance because of the ongoing trials of war criminals, the foundation succeeded in establishing close contacts with the association of trial reporters and other organisations promoting further education for journalists.

Because of its positive measures, the media programme is being well received in all countries of the region although it was launched only a short while ago. Even now, many successful informal partnerships and forms of cooperation exist with players who are important for the programme. The media programme greatly benefits from the fact that public authorities as well as the media appreciate that further development in this field is indispensable for the development of democracy.

CONCLUSION

In view of the difficult framework conditions prevailing in the programme regions, media promotion will retain its outstanding significance in development policy. Forming a core element of the promotion of modern democracy, it may contribute effectively and sustainably to overcoming the wide variety of political, economic, social, societal, and ecological deficits that exist.

Nino Galetti

1| *The author would like to thank Werner vom Busch, Dr Dirk Förger, Dr Karla Sponar and Frank Windeck, all members of the media programme staff, for providing content-related information during the writing of this contribution.*