

# First regional KAS Summer School of Political Communication

MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE OF THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG OFFERS HIGH-LEVEL TRAINING FOR POLITICAL SPOKESPERSONS AND PR EXPERTS

**Upon the invitation of the KAS Media Program South East Europe 17 young PR experts gathered for the first regional Summer School of Political Communication. It took place from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> July in Chişinău (Moldova). The participants from nine countries deepened their knowledge on communication planning, online campaigns and citizen dialogue. Further topics were the different requirements of governments and political parties in their media work and the media situation in the region.**

The summer school was opened by the Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, **Christian Spahr**. He introduced the concept of the training and emphasised the challenges of spokespersons of political parties and governments in the region – amongst others the highly polarised media landscape. “The citizens wish for an open dialogue with politicians and an active participation in the decision-making process. Press spokespersons have to address these needs,” said Spahr. Participants were looking for an intensive exchange of ideas and experiences with colleagues from the region and trainers. These expectations were met during four intensive days of workshops and Q&A sessions.

The first speaker **Clara Eaglen**, Head of Campaigns of the British Government’s Communications Department, explained different aspects of media planning and drafting of narratives. Eaglen underlined that every core message has to represent

the values of an organisation. “The political context is important. The core message has to be targeted towards the needs of the citizens,” so Eaglen. Furthermore, she provided know-how on strategic communication planning, using examples of different campaigns. During a group discussion the participants developed a draft communication strategy where they applied what they had learned.

**Challenges in communication: networking, fake news and evaluation**

At the first day of the training, participants gave short presentations on typical challenges in their work and presented best practices. Amongst others it became clear that strategic communication is not yet an integral part of the overall strategy of parties and government bodies in many countries. Targeting of communication measures and dialogue with the citizens via social networks is still in need of improvement. Moreover, the PR experts explained that good coordination of core messages among different departments is crucial. All teams should be informed about external communication priorities which is not always happening in practice. A big challenge is fake news. Participants agreed that fake social media profiles and trolls obstruct the online communication with citizens. The insufficient evaluation of campaigns has been identified as another weakness.

**Linda Jākobsonē**, Head of the Communication Department of the State

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Chancellery of Latvia, talked about professional and ethical principles for media relations. Together with the participants she established guidelines for communication with journalists, e.g. proactive and transparent media relations. Jākobsone furthermore provided insights into successful communication formats of the Latvian EU Presidency 2015.

#### **New digital tools make political communication management easier**

**Tabea Wilke**, Digital Strategist from Berlin, discussed new communication channels in political communication like Snapchat and the use of messengers like WhatsApp and Viber. She said that it is important to focus on the needs and wishes of individual target groups and develop the communication strategy accordingly.

**Christian Zinke** from the Communications and PR Agency "Praxisnah" based in Jena showed examples of political campaigns in Germany. Thereby he introduced the App "[connect17](#)" which helps to mobilise election campaigners. Furthermore he presented free online tools for graphic design, animations and social media management which are popular in Germany.

#### **Digital media give hope in a polarised media landscape**

In order to debate the political situation in Moldova, a panel discussion with three pro-European politicians took place on the third day: **Viorel Cibotaru**, President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PDL) and former Minister of Defence, **Maia Sandu**, leader of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and candidate for Presidency 2016, and **Liviu Vovc**, President of the Youth Organisation of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (PPDA). The discussion was moderated by Christian Spahr. Viorel Cibotaru emphasised that Moldova has similar challenges as the Balkan countries. Political campaigns however had to focus on country-specific characteristics. Maia Sandu talked about her experiences as leader of a young party. She explained that in a polarised media landscape it is important to

focus the communication on digital media and door-to-door campaigns. Liviu Vovc spoke about ownership structures of media in Moldova, amongst other topics.

#### **Presentation of SEECOM, regional association for government spokespersons**

**Vuk Vujnović**, Secretary General of the first European professional association for government spokespersons SEECOM, and Christian Spahr, SEECOM board member, introduced the organisation and its activities. "Established in 2013 SEECOM has nowadays more than 50 members from 13 countries," said Vujnović. The establishment of SEECOM was supported by the KAS Media Program South East Europe. Under the umbrella of SEECOM initiatives on more transparency and citizen dialogue are being realised since then. In his presentation on government communication in South East Europe, Vujnović explained that despite the motivation for more transparency and citizen dialogue government spokespersons are still confronted with various structural challenges. For example there is often only a reactive approach and in many cases a communication strategy is missing.

#### **Journalists expect information in suitable formats**

A panel discussion on political communication from the perspective of journalists and media experts followed. **Nadine Gogu**, Executive Director of the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), **Dumitru Ciorici**, Managing Editor at the Moldovan news portal "Agora", and **Alina Radu**, Director of "Ziarul de Gardă" daily, were part of the discussion. The panel was moderated by Christian Spahr. Nadine Gogu talked about the relationship between journalists and spokespersons in Moldova. She criticised that spokespersons often do not make all necessary information available for media representatives. Furthermore the daily reporting of many media outlets is strongly influenced by owners, advertisers and politicians. Alina Radu gave practical tips for the interaction of PR experts with journalists. It is unprofessional to ask journalists to not

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publish certain information. Spokespersons must never allow themselves to spread lies from politicians. Dumitru Ciorici recommended to always offering information in a format preferred by journalists, as digital media has to spread its content very fast.

Participants were highly motivated and very satisfied with trainers and content of the summer school. Furthermore they emphasised that the exchange among colleagues from South East Europe was very helpful. The KAS Media Program South East Europe will continue to offer seminars in the field of political communication.

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