

MEDIA PROGRAM

SOUTH EAST EUROPE

CHRISTIAN SPAHR

DR. VLADIMIR ZLATARSKY

September 2014

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Sustainable policy and media freedom are central on way to EU

KAS MEDIA PROGRAM: POLITICAL EDITORS OF LEADING MEDIA FROM ALBANIA, KOSOVO AND SERBIA DISCUSS WITH EXPERTS FROM GERMANY AND SOUTH EAST EUROPE

The EU and its enlargement are complex issues – both for journalists and the media audience. Therefore, the KAS Media Program South East Europe invites editors to an information seminar once a year. The main speaker is Hans-Joachim Falenski, foreign policy advisor of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag. High-ranking politicians and analysts from South East Europe also explain the accession perspectives of the Balkan countries.

Hellmut Hoffmann, German Ambassador in Tirana, opened this year's "EU seminar" for policy editors, which took place in Durrës, Albania from 4th to 6th September. Shortly after the Western Balkans conference in Berlin, he pointed out the previous active role of Germany and its future responsibility for the EU integration of South East Europe. All countries of the Western Balkans have a membership perspective, if they fulfill the requirements of the EU, says Hoffmann to the journalists from Albania, Kosovo and Serbia, as well as to two media representatives from Bulgaria.

CDU expert Hans-Joachim Falenski also reaffirms Germany's willingness for further expansion of the EU. He underlined that compliance of the common standards would be examined more closely for new EU candidates than it was before. An example is the sustainability in the administration: It is not permissible that after a change of government, most of the officials are being replaced – down to the lowest ranked. This is contrary to the democratic standards, and

leads to the loss of valuable knowledge that has been mediated with Western help.

Falenski also expressed that political and economic decisions should not only depend on the head of government of a country. For an efficient EU integration, capable government ministries, also regional and local governments with own competence are needed. Otherwise, important investments and modernisation will be delayed.

In addition, Falenski explained that from Berlin's perspective freedom of the press and the pluralism of opinions in candidate countries are key criteria. He shares the opinion of numerous parliamentarians and policy managers from Germany, which regularly seek information about the tense situation of South East Europe's media.

Albanian Deputy Foreign Minister points out greater dialogue within the Balkans

Top speaker from Albania was Deputy Foreign Minister Sokol Dervishi, who gave an overview of the relationship between his and the neighbouring countries. In the wake of the Kosovo Brussels Agreement of April 2013, the relationship with Serbia has improved. Dervishi spoke positively about a forthcoming visit of the Albanian Prime Minister in Belgrade, in which a number of bilateral agreements shall be signed. More cooperation within the Balkans is necessary.

Ilda Zhulali, Adviser to the Albanian President Bujar Nishani, then explained the perspective of EU membership of her

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country. A survey has shown that the Albanian population is far more "europhile" than people in other European countries.

Facts and analysis about the foreign and EU policy were presented by experts from several think tanks, including the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, the Group for Legal and Policy Studies from Pristina, the House of Europe in Tirana and the Albanian Institute for International Studies. The seminar was co-organized from the Albanian Media Institute, an independent NGO. Its director Remzi Lani and the head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, Christian Spahr, moderated the debates.

Participants discussed intensively with all speakers and listed many impressions and insights. Although many assessments of the speakers were no public statements, the journalists argued that the seminar format provides valuable background information for their future work. In late summer 2015, the KAS Media Program South East Europe intends to continue the seminar series at another venue, probably in Moldova.



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