

No Quality Journalism without Professional Education and Practical Training

EXPERTS' WORKSHOP

All over South East Europe quality journalism is a keyword when talking about improving the media situation and the economic survival of publishing houses and TV and radio stations. One of the most important preconditions for quality journalism is a modern and practical education.

Journalism education has been an issue among media professionals, NGOs and academic circles for quite a while – but there is still a lack of coordination. Where and how young journalists get prepared for their future career has been discussed by professors, media experts and journalists at the invitation of the KAS Media Program South East Europe on an experts' workshop in Sofia. There was a general consensus about the need of improvement of the current journalism education system in South East Europe. Furthermore, in a democratic society high standard education and professional training of journalists is a fundamental precondition for free and pluralistic media.

Recently, the media landscape in South East Europe had to take quite some criticism regarding freedom of the press. Several countries in the region have been dropping down in the relevant international press freedom rankings for years now. There is an ongoing trend towards 'tabloidization' of print and electronic media, the quality of media coverage is decreasing. In addition we face non-transparent ownership structures in which media owners, far from 'publishers' in the classical sense, invest in media business in order to get influence to enforce their

economic or political interests. Therefore several media owners have shown very little interest in independent and critical journalism so far. Hence, it is one of the medium term goals of the KAS Media Program to inspire publishing houses and media outlets to take part in the discussions about the ways of modernizing journalistic education in the region.

Sustainable development, professionalization and structuring of journalism education in South East Europe seem even more important against the background of a crisis of quality media. Experts from eight countries of the region presented current models and perspectives of journalism education in their home countries. They discussed different aspects of journalism education and exchanged ideas for improvement. Topic of discussion were also the often very unclearly structured and embedded into different faculties 'journalistic studies' and the predominance of theory compared to practical training. Most participants considered the balance between theory and practical training an important issue, but there were different country specific notions on how to achieve that.

Andreas Wolfers, head of the Henri-Nannen School of Journalism in Hamburg received a lot of attention for his presentation of the educational model applied at this German flagship-school of journalism. The Henri-Nannen School offers a very efficient combination of theory and practical training and produces some of the best qualified graduates in the country. The educational sector

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in South East Europe is technically and financially still much weaker and it is not yet playing in the same league but the shared practices were considered an encouraging stimulus.

the discussion about the overall framework conditions.

Differences and similarities between German and South East European academic journalism education were discussed after the presentation of Prof. Dr. Barbara Thomass of the Ruhr University in Bochum. A successful exchange of best-practices between the countries of the region has already been taking place in some areas. The heads of specialized centres for media development and journalistic training as well as Christian Spahr, on the side of the KAS Media Program South East Europe presented further possibilities and practices in the field of journalism education. Furthermore the experts talked in detail about special topics as investigative and multi-media journalism which are getting more and more important in the region.

The participants expressed their concern about the general education and the ethical standards and understanding of young journalists, but also about some challenges posed by the internet. Google and Wikipedia are often tempting some students and journalists not to read thoroughly and research the topics broadly, which is necessary for deeper analysis. Here the experts saw a need for action within the frame of modern journalism education.

As with other media issues, the workshop proved once more, how similar the problems in the region are despite of some distinctions in the details. Therefore coordinated action can lead to faster and more sustainable solutions. The participants appreciated the proposition of the KAS Media Program South East Europe to establish a working group on journalism education and develop a common action plan. As a first step country reports covering the current situation of journalism education in the countries of the region will be prepared. At further stages comparative surveys as well as academic research could be thought of. Furthermore media owners, state institutions and politicians should be included in