

Recommendations for Press Councils

CONCLUSIONS BY THE KAS MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE AND THE
ARTICLE 10 ECHR TASK FORCE (EUROPA-UNIVERSITÄT FRANKFURT/ODER)

Efficient self-regulation in the media sector is an important condition for ethical standards in news coverage and can prevent extensive regulation by state authorities. As such, it plays an important role for the trust of citizens in media and for the freedom of the press. Experts gathered by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Article 10 ECHR Task Force in Belgrade in October 2013 give the following ten key recommendations.

Broad fundament in the membership:
In order to create and develop legitimacy for self-regulation, it is crucial to involve all stakeholders: media owners and publishers, journalist associations, national and regional media, print, online and audiovisual media.

Variety in funding for high independence:
To guarantee a long-term independence, it is necessary to go for a mix of financial sources: media owners, journalist associations, indirect state funding and others.

Careful consideration of legal framework:
Successful self-regulation generally doesn't need a statutory legal basis. However, if a self-regulatory approach fails, a co-regulation by the sector and the state can be an option. The independent functioning of the Press Council must be guaranteed.

Broad composition of board of directors:
Besides choosing members by competence and motivation, a broad basis is important: publishers, senior and junior journalists in diverse media, civil society representatives, academics and lawyers. No politicians.

Transparency of work organisation:
Final decisions are to be made in plenary sessions, rather than in sections, in order to increase legitimacy. Procedures need to be defined in the statute or in rules of procedure, be kept short and guarantee the rights of the defendant media or journalists. Citizens and the public at large should be informed about the practices of the Press Council and possibilities of complaints.

Conciseness of Ethical Code: The Ethical Code of a Press Council should be clear and easy to understand. Otherwise it will not be widely noticed and rather misunderstood.

Same standards for all media: Quality press, tabloid media, radio, TV and news portals are distinctive platforms, but the ethical standards of journalism should be applied comparably.

Publication of decisions: The essence of a Press Council is to organise debate and create reflection on and awareness for journalistic ethics. Its decisions or opinions should be publicly communicated; the media should be encouraged to publish them.

Complaints Commission / Ombudsman:
A Complaints Commission and/or Ombudsman are very useful to settle disputes in a friendly way. The Ombudsman should not be a member of the Council himself/herself.

Training of journalists: The Press Council should organise or support training for journalists and editors, helping to create more awareness for media ethics.