

## Party spokespersons from the Balkans visit political Berlin

SUCCESSFUL ELECTION CAMPAIGNING, GERMAN MASS MEDIA, EU ENLARGEMENT AND ETHICS IN PR WERE THEMES OF A PROGRAMME FOR SOUTH EAST EUROPE

**Developments in Germany are followed with great interest in the Balkans, particularly, if not exclusively, in politics. Eleven spokespersons and PR managers from political parties in South East Europe took part in a study visit on political communication and external relations.**

The KAS Media Program South East Europe is increasing its cooperation with PR specialists from the political sphere. The idea behind this is that transparency in politics not only needs good journalists – governments and parties must also explain their actions comprehensibly. In 2013 the KAS consequently joined in establishing the first European professional association for government spokespersons, SEECOM ([www.seecom.info](http://www.seecom.info)). Since 2013 there is another network for spokespersons of political parties, which goes back to seminars in the KAS Academy in Cadenabbia (Italy). Mostly participants from this circle took up the invitation to a programme of dialogue in Berlin from 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> May. This was organised by the KAS Media Program South East Europe and the KAS Head Office.

The press spokespersons, PR managers and social media experts from eight countries, from Albania to Slovenia, met together for five days with renowned political managers, foreign policy experts and representatives of prominent media outlets. The aim was to find new ideas for the development of political communication in the Balkans, but also to discuss differences to Germany.

The visitors, the majority of whom were associated with the European People's Party (EPP), on the first day were mainly interested in election campaign strategies. With CDU General Manager Dr. Klaus Schüler they discussed the correct way to focus campaigns. The main examples were the successful Merkel election campaign in 2013 and this year's European election. Schüler's colleagues Dr. Stefan Hennewig (Internal Management) and Uwe Göpel (Social Media) explained further aspects of election campaign communications. In the discussion, dialogue with the public proved to be particularly important. A number of questions from participants were directed to the online strategy of the CDU, which has considerably recovered its position as a conservative party in recent years on the internet. On the following day, Schüler's predecessor in the CDU, currently MSL Consultant, Peter Radunski, gave further tips from experience over decades of campaigning.

**Election campaign strategies are a central interest of spokespersons of parties**

The Berlin Headquarters of the Adenauer-Stiftung was also able to get to know the group from the Balkans better at the beginning of the study visit. Frank Priess, Deputy Head of International Cooperation, Jens Paulus, Team Leader Europe, and Media Program Coordinator Martina Kaiser explained the involvement of the Foundation outside Germany. They addressed the significance of free media for democratisation and answered questions on

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Germany's responsibility for European integration. In the course of the week, the group also met the KAS Press Spokesman, Matthias Barner, who as former Director of the KAS Media Program South East Europe helped to initiate the promotion of political communication in the region.

Besides election campaigns and the work of the Foundation, the German media landscape was an important topic in the agenda. The group visited an editorial conference of the German tabloid BILD and the ARD studio in Berlin. During the BILD visit the participants had an animated discussion with political editor Matthias Kluckert on the choice of subjects of the popular tabloid newspaper which is also successful on the internet. At the ARD, the news broadcasts and reports from the Balkan region were of great interest. But the Germany model for financing broadcasting as independently as possible and the collaboration of regional stations in the ARD were also discussed. With regard to the development of media policy in South East Europe, independence and variety of the media are central themes.

#### **A message from German officials: Media freedom is important for EU integration**

Press freedom and media variety were also an aspect of informative discussions with Gunther Krichbaum, Chair of the EU Committee in the Bundestag, Hans-Joachim Falenski, foreign policy advisor of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, and Dr. Joachim Bertele, East European expert in the Chancellor's Office. All three emphasised the significance of a free media landscape for successful integration of the EU – an important message for a region in which a number of countries are rated as only "partially free" by media NGOs. But the chances of joining the EU of individual countries was also discussed intensively with regard to other aspects, so that the participants could gain detailed impressions of how the political development of their home countries is viewed in Germany. Fulfilment of the EU *acquis communautaire* and energy security were also subjects of discussion.

Professional and ethical questions in the work of the press were also covered in the one-week seminar. The press office of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group and of the Internet association Bitkom gave insights into their PR strategies. As well as the internal work organisation, various PR instruments were discussed, for example, the chances of success of background briefings and the application of representative opinion surveys. In addition, the KAS invited a press spokesperson and a journalist working in the capital to debate the boundaries of collaboration between politics and the media. Jens Teschke, spokesman of the Ministry of Agriculture and Markus Grabitz, correspondent of the daily newspaper *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, explained the meaning in journalistic jargon in Germany of „unter eins“ (the source can be attributed) and „unter drei“ (not for publication) and how they personally avoid conflicts of interest in their daily work.

#### **Participants want to strengthen exchanges**

According to opinions expressed by the group, nearly all parties associated with the EPP in South East Europe today have a designated department for communications, which does more than just sending out press releases. Nearly all party leaders have a profile on Facebook, one in three party headquarters twitters in the name of its leader. Many party leaders, however, prepare their own TV appearances – not every one of them has a specified spokesperson, who gives statements in their name. This demonstrates that the profession of press spokesperson is still developing.

All those taking part were highly satisfied with the insights gained into political Berlin and emphasised the value of the expert dialogue for their professional goals. The group expressed the unanimous wish in future to exchange professional know-how as a network, with Germany and within South East Europe. The KAS Media Program will accordingly continue its close cooperation with media specialists of the parties to further promote the professionalization of political communication.