

# EVENT REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

MEDIA PROGRAM  
SOUTH EAST EUROPE  
CHRISTIAN SPAHR

July 2015

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## Citizen-oriented campaigning

IN BELGRADE, COMMUNICATIONS EXPERTS OF POLITICAL PARTIES FROM SOUTH EAST EUROPE FOUND THE NETWORK „E-LECTION BRIDGE“

**Relevant, competent and authentic – this is how political parties must present themselves in election campaigns, according to the Federal Manager of the CDU, Dr. Klaus Schüler. He was the keynote speaker of a workshop on the topic of campaigning for communications experts of political parties from South East Europe. Meeting in Belgrade, 15 participants from 11 countries founded a Network to be called the “E-lection Bridge South East Europe”.**

Personalisation, visualisation and social media are just a few of the trends with which political parties have to confront in planning their election campaigns. In South East Europe there is the additional challenge of the mostly highly polarised media landscape. Newspapers and broadcasting channels seldom offer balanced reporting. Opposition parties above all complain about insufficient access to the media. From 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> July, experts invited by the KAS Media Program South East Europe discussed how political content could be communicated successfully under these conditions.

### **Networks for communications experts in Africa, Asia and South East Europe**

The model for this meeting of campaign managers was provided by existing KAS networks in Africa and Asia – there too, the Foundation brings together political parties under the heading “E-lection Bridge”. The aim is to exchange successful approaches for election campaigning and working with the media, to improve and modernise dialogue with citizens.

**Christian Echle**, Director of the KAS Media Programme Sub-Sahara Africa, began with a report of experiences of the “E-lection Bridge” in that region. The main point was to increase specialist knowledge and the exchange of information on political communication with neighbouring countries. The members of the network should not just take part in training courses, but offer one another mutual support in their practical work. Not only good ideas should be exchanged, said **Frank Priess**, KAS Deputy Head of European and International Cooperation. Difficulties and criticism must be expressed for the mutual further development of professional standards. Priess, together with the Head of the Media Program South East Europe, **Christian Spahr**, led participants through the programme.

**Dr. Schüler: “Forget ideologies, we are concerned with the life of the citizen”**

**Dr. Klaus Schüler** emphasised in his keynote address that communication with voters must be measured according to their interests. “Forget ideologies, we are concerned with the life of the citizen”, said the CDU election campaign manager. The hopes, the anxieties and the trust of the people were more important than party programmes. A successful election campaign must appeal in equal measure to reason and emotion. Parties had to persuade floating voters in particular, that their interests were being considered. A party’s political programme as a whole must nevertheless be unique. This also applied to the election campaign itself – directly copying the electoral campaign strategies of

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other parties or from other countries was not the way to success. In Germany, the USA and other regions such as South East Europe different approaches were required for communication with the public. Negative campaigns, for example, which were customary in the USA, were not rewarded by the voters in Europe. For the rest, parties had to ask themselves critically, in which areas they could be more competent and increase their prominence. The CDU, for example, was currently trying to win more women members and to emphasise themes such as the environment and quality of life in addition to its core issues like economic competence.

**Online electioneering  
 should not be regarded separately**

**Dr. Stefan Hennewig**, Head of Central Tasks and Services in the CDU headquarters, explained the significance of social media in election campaigning as seen by the CDU. The online election campaign should not be regarded separately from conventional means of communication. However, mainly party staff with an affinity for social media should be involved in the Internet – the online communication would otherwise not look authentic. Successful Web 2.0 campaigns combined information and entertainment, said Hennewig. As an example he mentioned an interactive election poster with Angela Merkel from the Bundestag election campaign of 2013 – people could cause the Chancellor to speak with a smartphone App, when they pointed their mobile telephone at the poster. New technical methods and new channels of communication were important in competing for voters' attention.

In a panel discussion with three workshop participants, Klaus Schüler and Frank Priess considered the question of how close the co-operation should be between PR experts of political parties and journalists. The CDU Federal Manager recommended keeping a professional distance, respecting facts, not engaging in propaganda and not forgetting ethical standards. Reila Bozdo, election campaign advisor of the Albanian Democratic Party, raised the question how

opposition parties could afford efficient media work when the media favoured the parties in government. She advised also giving interviews to smaller and regional media. Participants expressed their agreement that trusting and sustainable relationships with journalists were of importance and these should meet professional standards. The topics discussed were further developed in a meeting with the head of the KAS Serbia and Montenegro, **Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes**.

**Experts from South East Europe  
 wish to continue working together**

For future exchanges within the framework of the "E-lection Bridge", participants nominated up to 20 individual topics which should be discussed in future network meetings. The experts from South East Europe expressed the wish to continue and further develop their collaboration. The KAS Media Program South East Europe will accordingly also offer corresponding workshops in future for communications experts of political parties, in different countries, but always with participants from the entire region.

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