

# MEETING REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

MEDIA PROGRAM  
SOUTH EAST EUROPE  
DOBRINA TRIFONOVA  
CHRISTIAN SPAHR

June 2015

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## PR of parties: Modernisation under high pressure

NETWORK MEETING OF PRESS SPOKESPERSONS AND PR EXPERTS IN BUCHAREST AT THE INVITATION OF THE KAS MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE

**The press and public relations work of political parties in South East Europe takes place in a polarised media landscape. Spokespersons and PR managers must also establish themselves as strategic advisers within parties and ensure their teams are adequately equipped. The rapid growth of social media creates additional pressure to adopt new PR instruments.**

Ten press spokespersons and communications experts from six South East European countries met in Bucharest on 6th and 7th June 2015 to discuss political media work with German colleagues. The KAS Media Program South East Europe organised this year's network meeting, with the title "Communicating Democracy", for the first time together with the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the Brussels-based Think Tank of the European People's Party (EPP).

### **Workshop in co-operation with "Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies"**

The workshop was opened by the Director of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, **Christian Spahr**, and EVP Press Spokeswoman **Ecaterina Casinge**. Casinge emphasised the importance of international exchange on political communication in addressing similar challenges existing in many countries. Correct communication of European ideas was crucial to the ability to take collective decisions more easily. Developing networks of press spokespersons of governments and political

parties was one of the tasks of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, said Spahr. "We are responsible for supporting the development of professional and value-oriented political communication." This was particularly necessary in countries which were undergoing a continuous process of transformation. "Not only are the elites demanding access to information, so are the public. Political power is subject to more critical scrutiny, and social media play a considerable role in this process."

### **Polarised media landscape is challenge for opposition parties**

In keynote contributions the experts from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia outlined the difficulties of the media environment for their work. **Jonila Godole**, Director of IDMC, the Albanian partner organisation of the KAS, drew attention to conflicts of interest between journalists and politicians in Albania. A tenth of parliamentarians are former journalists who used their position in the media as a springboard for their political careers.

In the polarised media landscape, many journalists were unable to report independently, added **Laura Vorpsi**, the Head of the Department for European Integration of the Democratic Party of Albania. **Bojan Stanić**, PR Manager of the leader of the Bosnian party HDZ 1990, sees monopolistic tendencies and lack of transparency in media ownership as the primary cause of the absence of press freedom.

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## Imprint

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The participants agreed that opposition parties above all have difficulties in presenting their positions in the media. In a number of countries in South East Europe, publishers and broadcasters tend to report favourably about governing parties and avoid conflicts with the ruling elites.

As a result, **Evelina Kovacheva** and **Denitsa Panayotova**, PR advisers of the Bulgarian party alliance "Reformist Block", recommend parties from the opposition to rely on direct marketing and street campaigning in election campaigns. In addition, the influence of social media on debates should not be underestimated.

### **Party communication must be adapted to suit a number of target groups**

**Isabelle Fischer**, Press spokeswoman of the CDU in North Rhine-Westphalia, presented her regional association's communications concept to participants. Here an integrated team for communications, strategy and PR had proved its worth. The communications expert described its way of working with the keywords "cross media, cross channel, target group specific, Infotainment". The content must be adapted to suit different target groups. This kind of "multiway communication" distinguished, for example, between active party members, newly interested and potential voters. The PR strategy had to be continuously reviewed and kept up-to-date. Internally it was necessary to be conscious of what was missing in earlier strategic planning and what can be done better in future. In addition it was important to make skilful use of new communication channels like WhatsApp and develop appropriate content for these.

WhatsApp was currently the most popular social medium in Germany with 35 million users, explained **Tabea Wilke**, a social media trainer from Berlin. She pointed out that content for a larger public in social media must be brief and compactly displayed. Not least, the information should be compatible with mobile devices. Currently popular on Facebook were so-called "spoilers", short videos in amateur

style from the everyday life of politicians. In this way supporters and voters obtain live impressions of political work.

At the end of the seminar, **Peter Lausmann**, Political Editor of the Westdeutsche Zeitung in Düsseldorf and the Rumanian political journalist **Ion M. Ioniță** of the newspaper Adevarul conducted a debate on the limits of influence of PR personnel on journalists. Lausmann emphasised that journalists must work transparently and remain authentic. The differentiation of information and personal opinion was important. Ioniță also argued that media representatives must report facts in a neutral manner and should not use their position for propaganda. But the changes in the journalistic profession were constantly reducing the ability to attend to details. Multitasking was already a fact of life for many colleagues, who were reporter, cameraman and editor in one person. In addition, it was increasingly difficult to recognise PR content as such, when time was lacking and journalists were inundated with information via social media

### **Exchange of successful approaches from Germany and South East Europe**

The group of party press spokespersons and PR managers showed great interest in continuing the exchange on a regular basis. Successful approaches from Germany and the countries of South East Europe were of equal interest. The KAS Media Program South East Europe will also in future offer a special workshop at least once a year for the network. The party spokespersons could also exchange views at other meetings with government spokespersons and journalists. The goal is, through professional media work, to provide voters with improved information about political processes. Ethical standards in relationships with citizens and journalists are also an integral part of a modern definition of political communication.