

How can journalists exercise their right to information?

KAS MEDIA PROGRAM AND "N-OST" ORGANISE FOR THE SECOND TIME A "LEGAL LEAKS" SEMINAR IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE – THIS TIME IN TIRANA

Under the label "Legal Leaks" journalists from South East Europe receive practical training on the topic of access to information. The concept was developed by the NGOs "Access Info Europe" and "n-ost", based in Madrid and Berlin. Another instalment of the seminar in cooperation with the KAS Media Program South East Europe took place in Tirana on 22nd and 23rd September 2016.

The workshop had the goal of offering knowledge on the right to information to investigative journalists and giving them useful strategies and tips from experienced data journalists. **Christian Spahr**, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, said that reporters need to insist on their right of access to information, even against partly opaque authorities. For this purpose, experts from Germany, the Netherlands and Spain were invited to explain this challenge in a comprehensible and compact manner.

At the beginning **Dr Jonila Godole**, Executive Director of the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture (IDMC) in Tirana, gave an overview on the media situation in Albania. In the Albanian media landscape one-sided interpretations and entertainment prevail, according to Dr Godole. This also influences media students who often do not see any future in the journalistic profession and switch to PR.

There is already a good legal basis for access to information in most South East European countries, explained **Alba Gutierrez** of Access Info Europe (AIE).

Albania passed a freedom of information act in 1999. Serbia did the same in 2003 and Montenegro in 2005. In order to make the right to information practically enforceable, AIE and n-ost have published the manual "Legal Leaks" in several languages (www.legalleaks.info), some of them with the support of the KAS Media Program South East Europe.

Information requests for advanced reporters

However, a wide gap between theory and practice exists. Often inquiries are processed slowly or authorities do not answer at all. Staying persistent is of great importance, commented **Arne Semsrott**, journalist and supervisor of the German online platform fragdenstaat.de. "Networking is another possibility. Don't be afraid to ask fellow journalists for help," said Semsrott. He gave advice for filing applications with authorities and the respective formulations. Legal measures can be taken against incomplete answers or rejections. International organisations can be helpful; in some cases they give financial support.

Basics of data journalism were presented by **Adriana Homolová**, freelance journalist from Amsterdam. It was her priority to show the participants how to use data wisely for their stories – collecting and analysing data being just one step of the overall process. "Use the gathered information in a certain context and give your stories not only numbers and charts,

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but also a face", said Homolová. The data should be memorable and presented interestingly to reach a large audience.

All three trainers offered personal consultations on specific topics in small groups following their presentations. The participants gave a very positive assessment and explained that the seminar will help them with the enforcement of their rights to information.



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