

Welcome Address

A Network for Values

Frank Priess,
Deputy Head of European and International Cooperation, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister Marković,
your Excellencies,
Mr. Tegovski,
Mr. Vujnović,
dear participants of SEECOM 2013,

I am very happy to be here today in Montenegro, in a special place – Budva – and on a special occasion, without parallel in Europe.

All those gathered here are united in one objective: professional communication about politics. For the citizens of our countries to be able to understand and have a say in politics, of course freedom of expression and freedom of the press are required.

But it is not only the media that are responsible for conveying political ideas in breadth and depth. Those of us involved in politics must keep this in mind. We ourselves have at least the same degree of responsibility. As political actors it is our most important task in communication, to explain democracy: How does the legislative process function? How do government and public authorities work? What rights and duties do the citizens have? And how can they involve themselves in political processes as committed democrats?

Even when I think about Germany and other EU countries, I believe we have a deficit here. For many Western Europeans, democracy is something established. Many of us, particularly younger people, no longer have the experience of lack of freedom.

In South East Europe the situation is different – here more people still have personal experience of a lack of political freedom. Democracy can be experienced here as significant improvement, and, at the same time, the process of transformation is still in progress. Transparent political processes still cannot be taken for granted. Orientation to compromise between political actors is less strongly pronounced. Many political decisions involve genuine questions of strategic direction.

For those concerned in political communication this is a situation which, from a professional point of view, could scarcely be more challenging and exciting. The experience of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung with its Media Program South East Europe is this: in the area of political communication there are a number of very engaged and highly motivated professional actors, but better resources and structures are required, and there is a need for a generally recognised concept of profession.

But even more important is the professional attitude of PR managers in politics. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung actively involves itself as one of the hosts of SEECOM because here experts gather who see their job as a social responsibility. The Declaration of Budva, which together we were able to adopt last year, is a very good summary of the ethical aspects of political communication.

I am pleased that we are taking another step together on this fundament – and intend to found the first professional association for public sector communicators in South East Europe. This profile for an organisation is unique in Europe. I am pleased that the idea of Vuk Vujnović and my colleague Christian Spahr has also been broadly supported by other partners. As someone who conceived of and helped to build the media programme of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, I attach great importance to professional networks of this kind.

The Association could be developed into an instrument with which the principles of the Budva Declaration could be converted into practical outcomes. In the Statute of the Association proposed, not only professional communication is named as an objective, but also a strengthening of citizen involvement and democratic values. SEECOM is a network for values.

I am pleased that here, in the birth-place of the Budva Declaration, the founding of the SEECOM Association is on the agenda on Sunday. Together with those who have spoken before me I wish the new Association many engaged members and every success.

And now I wish us all a very stimulating and rewarding SEECOM Conference 2013.

Thank you very much for your attention.