

# INTERVIEW

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

**MEDIA PROGRAM**  
**SOUTH EAST EUROPE**  
CHRISTIAN SPAHR

October 2013

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## “Online media are meaningful for the diversity of opinions”

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN SPAHR, HEAD OF KAS MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE, FOR THE SERBIAN NEWS PORTAL B92.NET (PUBLISHED IN REPORT FORM ON 26 OCTOBER 2013). INTERVIEWER: MARKO NEDELJKOVIĆ.

**Marko Nedeljković (MN): What are the biggest problems in the media in this region, according to your experience?**

Christian Spahr (CS): The media in South Eastern Europe are highly polarized. On one hand, there is very positive reporting about governments, and on the other hand, a few media report very negatively about them, but there is often no balance in the articles. Media are involved in political campaigns too, and it's difficult for them to weigh different opinions, to hear different sides, and also to find a position in the middle.

The framework conditions for the media are difficult too, because many countries in South Eastern Europe don't have good framework conditions in terms of media laws and self-regulation. In a few countries there is a lack of media legislation which defines standards in terms of ownership concentration, economic transparency and the rights of journalists at their workplaces.

Self-regulation in the region should also be developed further. There are some good examples, for instance the Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is very professional, but we don't have the same standards in all of the Balkan countries.

The big drawback in South Eastern Europe is also due the fact that a lot of media owners in the region are not publishers. They are businessmen from other sectors, some of them are active in politics and a lot of them use media to support their own business or political interests. They are not entrepreneurs in the sense of publishers which want to make a quality product, but using media as political instrument.

**MN: KAS and your office organize or support a lot of activities for journalists. What are your main goals?**

CS: A main goal within the Media Program is the education of journalists. In Germany, KAS has a school of journalism which provides basic education for journalists. In South Eastern Europe, we don't provide basic education for journalists, but we offer further education in fields which are politically important. For instance, we support investigative journalism because it helps to create transparency in politics and other fields of the society.

**MN: Why did you decide to support Entrepreneurial Journalism? \***

CS: Entrepreneurial journalism is a technical term which is not well known in the public and basically means: being a freelancer or self-employed and understanding journalism as an independent business concept, mostly on the Internet. This is very important because traditional media still don't offer the diversity of opinions which is appropriate for a democracy. Of course, print media are very important, but in some countries of South Eastern Europe only a minority of the population is reading newspapers. Television is very important, but on TV it is more difficult to explain complicated matters. The Internet use is not yet on a very high level, around 50 per cent in many Balkan countries, but it is increasing. Therefore it is meaningful to develop online media, especially online journalism, to make sure that different opinions have a chance to be published. It is also important to give young journalists an opportunity to have an entry into the market.

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**MN: About young journalists. What do they need to succeed? Is it enough to look for a job in established media or should they think more like entrepreneurs?**

CS: Definitely they should at least consider being self-employed, because the working conditions in a lot of media outlets are not very good, and a lot of media owners are not supporting critical and independent journalism. Besides, journalists are not very well paid in the region generally. Being self-employed is also an opportunity for young journalists to do what they want to do, and to write what they want to write - not to write what somebody else wants them to write. That's why I think entrepreneurial journalism can be a good alternative and a chance, especially for young journalists to start their careers and to be independent. In addition, for the launch of an online project, it often needs less resources and money as for print media or television.

\* From 23 to 25 October 2013, the KAS Media Program South East Europe offered a workshop in Entrepreneurial Journalism in Belgrade. It combined basics of Web journalism with practical trainings and the development of individual online projects. Participants were young journalists from Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Romania.