

Welcome address

Internet regulation – a crucial topic for journalists

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Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear colleagues,

a very warm welcome to our lectures and panel discussion today. As far as I can see, today's topic is relevant for journalists, media experts and NGO representatives as well as diplomats, because these groups of experts are gathered here together.

Prof. Weberling, who will speak a keynote today, and the KAS Media Program are having joint expert workshops on Media Law in different countries, and we are this time in Bucharest. Prof. Weberling runs the "Article 10 ECHR Task Force" at the University of Frankfurt (Oder) in Germany, and this expert group inspired by the ideas of the European Convention for Human Rights has a focus on South East Europe as much as the KAS Media Program.

I am myself a journalist by education, not a lawyer. I don't know how many thousands of pages of court decisions have been written on Internet topics. But I believe we all agree on one observation: The reality of the Internet is much ahead of the legislation. No fundamentally new technologies in human history were implemented as fast as the Internet and mobile phones. They changed deeply our daily life and our way of thinking. Quite often, we are not even fully aware of the extent of these changes. No wonder lawmakers lag behind.

Especially for journalists, decisions on Internet legislation, but also the debate of media self regulation on the Web are crucial. To name only some of the challenges: Intellectual property is not just an academic topic, it affects the daily work of reporters. Might others copy-paste my work without telling me? Will I have control about the future use of my work, and will I be properly paid for online reporting? Or, business models and licence fees: Can really everything be for free? Is there an opportunity for publishers to make money with editorial content, or is Google the only winner? To which extent are publishers and journalists responsible for user comments, and how can hate speech be fought without limiting the freedom of expression? How much anonymity is necessary to protect personal interests, and how much transparency do we need for fruitful debates in our societies ...

Another important aspect is how journalists can protect themselves and their sources in a technological environment in which everybody leaves long-term traces and governments, multinational companies and hackers might get access to one's own data.

Last but not least, how can regulation and self-regulation in this field be harmonised on the international level, because we all now that with the exception of few countries like China, the World Wide Web cannot be governed by national politics.

We would like to discuss these topics on the basis of general estimations of the experts present here, but also with a specific perspective of South East Europe. Topics like copyright, hate speech, and the protection of investigative journalists are sometimes discussed in a different way here than in Western European countries for instance.

Thank you very much for your attention.