

Challenges in journalism education:

Digitalisation, responsibility, independence, added value and collaboration

Christian Spahr, Director Media Program South East Europe, KAS

Excellencies,
Dear partners and friends,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this international conference on journalism education. For the first time, media stakeholders from 15 countries are gathering in South East Europe to discuss education reforms and better cooperation between universities and media outlets.

In times of fake news, political crises and shrinking budgets of media, young journalists need better training than ever to fulfil their role as a watchdog of democracy, and to provide quality reporting.

Today's conference is based on findings of a KAS Task Force on journalism education that has been founded in 2013 to investigate the quality of professional training in the region. University professors and NGO directors from eight countries have done scientific pioneer work by publishing two books including recommendations for reforms. The last publication shows the perspective of the students who ask for more practical exercises and better equipment. My colleague Manuela Zlateva, one of the editors, will present you the key findings later.

I see five challenges to which journalism education needs to respond in better ways:

1. **Technological revolution.** Already today, journalists need to combine text and video, online and print or TV. One person produces the same news in different forms. Reporting via smartphone is becoming popular and the limits between professional and hobby journalism fade away. Can universities keep the pace?
2. **Civic responsibility.** In parallel to the increasing use of technology, societal attitude and ethical standards of journalists are gaining importance. As we reach more viewers in a shorter time, we need to make sure to be fair and accurate – not only quicker. When copying is easy, we need an extra effort to check sources and respect intellectual property. If our political model of liberal democracy is threatened, we must help citizens make up their opinions. The “mission statement” of journalists needs to be sharpened in the light of political transition, fake news and populism.

3. **Independent start-ups.** Because traditional media are going through an economic crisis and are often controlled by media moguls with political agendas, they become less attractive employers for young professionals. More and more, they find their own niches on the internet and create start-ups for independent or investigative reporting. Entrepreneurial journalism should become part of the curricula.
4. **Producing added value.** Facts are available everywhere nowadays, and usually faster on social media. Traditional media, but also news portals will only survive when they offer more than facts – in-depth analysis, background info, classification of facts and well-argued opinions. Both for personal career paths and the success of media outlets this is increasingly important and should be emphasised in journalism education.
5. **Collaboration in education.** Due to the changes in technology and media consumption habits, universities, media outlets, government agencies and NGOs need to collaborate more closely than ever to ensure a journalistic training that is keeping up with the challenges of the digital era. Today we have gathered stakeholders from all these groups to work together.

According to official EU figures 37 percent of Bulgarians and 46 percent of Romanians consider information on social media to be reliable. In contrast, a representative KAS survey showed that only 12 percent of Bulgarians and 28 percent of Romanians believe in the independence of professional media. They have become less credible than Facebook. This gives us an idea how big the challenge is for the media as a whole, but also in the field of journalism education.

I am looking forward to new insights in today's panel discussions with some of the best European experts in this field. We will also deepen the findings in workshops and draft recommendations. We are including those who are directly concerned, the students from different countries, who are invited to participate in the debates.

I wish us all a highly interesting and inspiring conference and I'm passing the word to my colleague Thorsten Geissler, Director of the KAS Bulgaria office.

Thank you very much for your attention.