

Welcome speech

The threefold challenge of media in South East Europe

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Ms. Minister Pavlova, Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear partners and friends,

A very warm welcome on behalf of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung to all of you. This year's South East Europe Media Forum is a very special one for us: It is returning to Bulgaria after almost ten years. In 2007, the Forum was founded by Oliver Vujović and SEEMO with the support of the KAS office Croatia. In 2008, it took place in Sofia for the first time.

The KAS Media Program South East Europe is almost as young as SEEMF. In 2005, our Zagreb office started this initiative for European integration in the field of media. Since 2007, we have a permanent office in Sofia: Today and tomorrow we invite you, our most important partners and distinguished media professionals, to celebrate our 10th anniversary in Bulgaria with us.

We have done many successful projects together: We developed SEEMF as a main platform for controversial debate between reporters, NGOs, politicians and media managers. With our partners, we run one of the world's best schools for investigative journalists. Trainers and alumni of the BIRN Summer School have worked on the Panama Papers or helped to put corrupt officials in jail. We organise training in ethical and entrepreneurial journalism for young colleagues because they will change the profession in future. We also offer training for political communicators: They are equally responsible for informing citizens in a transparent manner. Therefore we founded SEECOM as the first professional association of government PR experts in Europe. Tomorrow, we will discuss more in detail how media assistance can effectively help.

South East European media have a threefold challenge. First, to overcome deficits originating in the political transformation: Editorial interference by politicians and owners, high concentration and small markets. Second, finding answers to globalisation and digitalisation which is more difficult under these circumstances. And third, to play a helpful role when it comes to fundamental political decisions on EU integration and the preservation of liberal democracies.

During this Forum, we will talk about media freedom which is mainly a political responsibility. But we will also discuss the duties of journalists in insecure times: Is reporting on current affairs enough, or do we need to defend fundamental European values? Where is the thin line between journalism and activism? How can we limit effects of disinformation and enhance media literacy? This debate must not have regional borders. For instance, Ukraine has become a laboratory for debunking fake news and creating alternative media. Ukraine and Poland are in the focus when we discuss European values. Therefore we have looked beyond the Balkans and invited Ukrainian and Polish colleagues to enter into an exchange with us.

Let me close with a few observations that seem crucial to me in the field of media development:

- It helps to speak up and make our concerns public in as many ways as possible.
- Many journalists feel powerless – we need to strengthen solidarity and mutual support.
- We have to spread the word about successful investigations and new business models.
- Investigative journalism, as an instrument for transparency, supports democratisation.
- Journalists from this region need more, not less support by EU and Western partners.
- Journalists need to identify allies in politics – those who support their role as a watchdog.
- Those who breach media freedom can only be convinced by political or financial pressure.

I wish us all a conference that enriches us professionally, intellectually and by being part of a community of partners and friends. Now it is my pleasure to give the word to Dr. Lars Hänsel, head of all European KAS offices, who strongly supports our work in the region. Thank you.