



December 2018

Media Programme South East Europe

Independence of Broadcasting in Times of Digital Transformation

At the invitation of the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) journalists, media experts and diplomats discussed the role of broadcasting and its independence in regard to the diverse changes in the digital age.

Manuela Zlateva

How are radio and television changing? How should these traditional media respond to the challenges of the digital transformation? What do these changes mean for the credibility and independence of media reporting? And what role does public broadcasting play nowadays? These were the main topics of a panel discussion on 11 December in Chişinău.

The event was opened by **Hendrik Sittig**, Head of the KAS Media Programme South East Europe. "Freedom of the press and expression are the main pillars of a democracy. This does not change with the progressive digitisation of our lives," emphasised Sittig. In his point of view, the enormous technical change offers many opportunities to promote and strengthen pluralism within the society. During his keynote speech, the journalist and former Director of Radio Programmes at Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR) **Johann Michael Möller** commented on the changed framework conditions for the public service broadcasting that had arisen as a result of the digitisation: "The internet has made the competition even more stringent. Moreover, the formation of opinion bubbles on the web, unfortunately, does not promote democracy." In his view and in regard to these changes, the public service broadcasting plays an important socio-political role. Public service broadcasting in Germany was founded after the terrible experiences of the Nazi rule and the Second World War – deliberately independent of politics and business. "This was very important for the democratic and peaceful development of Germany," said Möller. He explained that it was a very successful model, in which neither the politicians, nor, for example, the advertisers were allowed to influence the programme. Möller also said that journalists are responsible only to their

own conscience and do not self-censor themselves. In comparison to South East Europe, the media expert identified the problems of the region in the lack of mechanisms to protect journalists and in the dependent socio-political structures that do not allow quality journalism to its full extent. He also addressed the current challenges which the media industry is facing, such as the enormous speed of the digitisation. Möller also gave as an example the experimenting with artificial intelligence as an important factor for the media and the competitive situation, in which the media outlets have to fight much more for the attention of the users.

Independence of Media Possible Through Quality Journalism

Afterwards, a panel discussion on the role of broadcasting in Moldova and Romania took place. It was moderated by Hendrik Sittig. **Val Butnaru**, founder and CEO of Jurnal Trust Media Holding based in Chişinău, talked about the importance of quality journalism. He criticised the journalists who quickly write online articles and do not consider quality principles. **Cătălin Gomboş**, journalist at Radio Romania in Bucharest, said in this regard that one must look at the good examples of old school journalism. In his opinion, it was good that the internet has made possible developments such as citizen journalism. But

here the old journalistic principles remain important as well.

Ecaterina Covali, General Producer for a group of local Moldovan television channels under the umbrella "Canal Regional", emphasised that the independence of media in a country is strongly linked to its democratisation and media development.

Anastasia Nani, Deputy Director of the Independent Journalism Center in Chişinău, identified

the media concentration as one of the biggest problems in Moldova. She described some media houses as supporters of certain political circles. The panel discussion attracted the interest of local media which also reported about the event. The experts in the audience participated in the discussion with numerous questions.

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