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Media Programme South East Europe



Quality and trust as a necessity for the media in South East Europe

At the international conference "New challenges for media freedom in South East Europe", journalists and media experts from the region and Germany discussed political influences on media, credibility of journalism and digital transformation in Tirana on 18th June 2019

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The one-day conference was hosted by the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Albanian Media Institute. Media experts, journalists and diplomats from South East Europe and Germany addressed the following questions: How has media freedom changed after the spread of new technologies? Why are innovations in the media sector necessary? Why is it important to regain the credibility of journalism?

The international conference was opened by **Hendrik Sittig**, Head of the Media Programme South East Europe. He underlined the role of journalists as observers and watchdogs of a functioning democracy. However, Sittig emphasised that this function hasn't been always fulfilled by

the media professionals in South East Europe. „Sometimes this happens, because they are victims of threats and political pressure. Under such conditions, it is a real challenge to be a good journalist. For that reason, the aim of this confer-

ence is to find ways to encourage greater media freedom in South East Europe”, he said. During the opening, **Remzi Lani**, Executive Director of the Albanian Media Institute, emphasised that the media in the region are facing many political and economic challenges. In his opinion these should be discussed more intensively in order to find common solutions.

Quality reporting as a precondition for trust in the media

The first panel discussion dealt with the risks of freedom of expression. **Dragan Sekulovski**, Executive Director of the Macedonian Journalists Association (AJM) moderated the talk. **Leila Bičakčić**, Director of the Center for Investigative Reporting in Sarajevo, spoke about the media situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She criticized the political influence on the journalists in her country. Bičakčić explained that the Center for Investigative Reporting functions like a news agency providing topics and reports to other media. According to her this model offers a possibility to minimise the political influence. Regarding the funding of such centers, she said that it is difficult to survive without international funding. Another problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina in her point of view is the ethnic division of the society, which also strongly influences the media landscape.

Adelheid Feilcke, Head of the Western Balkans department at Deutsche Welle, commented on the declining quality of the South East European media as a major challenge. A countermeasure in her point of view could be the investment of media literacy. Unfortunately, citizens got used to the unprofessional way of reporting of many media outlets and do not demand higher media standards. “This also leads to a lack of competition in the media market,” said Feilcke. Therefore, it would be necessary to reduce the number of media companies in favor of the quality of the media coverage. **Lutfi Dervishi**, journalist of the Albanian public service television and media expert, agreed that quality and trust in media are the base for media freedom. He underlined that the reforms should begin in the media houses. In his opinion, the journalists should question their

work and professionalism in order to improve themselves. “This also requires strong support from the management and the General Directors”, Dervishi said. A good sign would be when the public broadcasters start to produce more investigative stories. **Sandra Križanec**, anchor at the Croatian TV channel N1 (CNN partner channel), commented that international media owners have a positive impact on media freedom in the region, as they often ensure independent editorial work. Moreover, she explained that live broadcasting is a good way to neutralise political influences, as it doesn’t allow reports to be subsequently changed.

Adaptability of the media to the digital transformation - the key to success

The Montenegrin innovation expert **Vladimir Vulić** spoke about digital challenges. He encouraged the audience to seek new approaches in order to respond adequately to media changes. He gave many examples of companies that were unable to keep pace with the development of new technologies, and thus lost the competition in their markets. Vulić explained that if changes inside the organisations slow down compared to external circumstances, the company won’t be able to adapt, thus threatening its own existence.



Talk with innovation expert Vladimir Vulić

The innovation expert involved the audience into the conversation by inviting three participants to join the discussion. Together with the experts, he discussed new trends such as the use of digital graphics and 3D visualisations in news reports. A special focus was placed on mobile journalism as a form of media productions that will be much more implemented in the future.

Credibility of reporting remains an important topic for the media usage

The last panel discussion was dedicated to the role of social media and the impact of fake news and disinformation. The panel was moderated by **Ioana Avadani**, Executive Director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Bucharest. The German journalist **Karolin Schwarz** said that international media cooperation in the field of disinformation and fact checking is of great importance in order to develop regional solutions and approaches. **Milka Tadić Mijović**, President of the Center for Investigative Journalism in Montenegro, added that the media should make better use of social networks to overcome censorship.

The Bulgarian social media expert **Alexandra Atanasova** talked about the psychological aspects of disinformation and fake news. She explained how they work: "The more emotionally we react to fake news, the greater is its influence." **Alfred Lela**, Director of the Albanian news portal Politiko.al, said that today we are suffering from a heavy dependence on digital platforms. For this reason in his opinion, journalism should return to its basic values, so that it could regain the confidence of the citizens.

About 150 participants from more than ten countries attended the conference. The event was followed with great interest by the Albanian media, which broadly covered the event. The KAS Media Programme South East Europe will further dedicate its activities to the topic and offer further events in this area.



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