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Media Programme South East Europe

# ARD Secretary General Dr. Susanne Pfab Visiting Bulgaria

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**At the invitation of the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the ARD Secretary General, Dr. Susanne Pfab, held talks on 18 December on the current situation of public service broadcasting in Bulgaria and spoke about the social significance of independent public service broadcasting for the democratic development.**

*Manuela Zlateva*

During her visit in Bulgaria **Dr. Susanne Pfab** met the Chairman of the parliamentary group of the Bulgarian ruling party GERB **Tsvetan Tsvetanov**. They exchanged views on the current challenges and threats to the democratic values and principles in Europe. Topics of the discussion were also the media situation in Bulgaria and the Russian disinformation campaigns in many European countries. Dr. Pfab and Tsvetanov agreed that the established media need countermeasures against disinformation, by focusing on quality journalism and independent reporting. They also talked about the current political situation in Bulgaria and in the EU, especially in regard to the upcoming European elections.

After the conversation with Tsvetanov, Pfab met the Chairperson of the Association of the European Journalists, **Irina Nedeva**. Both exchanged views on the concrete issues of the media market in Bulgaria and the working conditions in the field journalism. "Unfortunately, solidarity among journalists is limited. That is why joint efforts for better conditions are difficult," Nedeva said. In addition, she explained that the journalism education, which is primarily organised at the universities, is very theoretical and less practical orientated.

Afterwards, the ARD Secretary General met the Director of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) **Alexander Velev**. Here the current situation of the public service broadcasting was the main talking point. Velev explained its legal and financial framework in Bulgaria. "Unfortunately, the public service media has suffered for many years

under chronic underfunding, so that many ideas – such as a youth radio or the expansion of digital radio, which is already an international standard – haven't been implemented," he said.

## Independence of Media Reporting Should Be Ensured

Later Dr. Susanne Pfab gave a keynote speech on the current challenges for public service broadcasting in Germany and Europe at an evening reception with partners of the KAS Media Programme South East Europe, journalists, diplomats and representatives of non-governmental organisations,. She recalled that public service broadcasting was founded by the Allies in West Germany after the terrible experiences of the Second World War. She underlined that the media coverage on radio and television should be consciously possible without political and economic influences. This understanding has developed into a successful model over the past decades in Germany and nowadays most people trust the public service broadcasters.

"Independence is our highest asset – our foundation. It has been repeatedly reaffirmed and concretised in many verdicts, in particular of our highest Constitutional Court," underlined the ARD Secretary General. Moreover, independent content also requires financial independence. For that reason, it would be important to find funding models that enable this freedom – without external influence. Nevertheless, she noted that most of the members of the European Broadcasting Union are funded from their respective national

budgets. However, this can only work well, when political parties with deep-rooted democratic principles and traditions are in the government. Further requirements for public service broadcasting, in her point of view, are the credibility and trust of citizens in media. "The citizens don't only need to be convinced that the journalists can report independently, but also that they do it," Pfab said. She also referred to the strategic importance of innovation in times of recent media transformations that could better serve younger audiences, listeners and online users.

**Hendrik Sittig**, Head of the Media Programme South East Europe, pointed out in his welcome

address that the independence of journalists and their work are high values in a democracy: "Without this so-called fourth pillar, a true democracy could not function. Therefore, it is the task of each authority to protect and promote this basic principle – especially within the European Union. Independent public service broadcasting is an extremely important component of democracy," Sittig said.

The visit of the ARD Secretary General in Sofia was followed with great interest by the Bulgarian media.

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