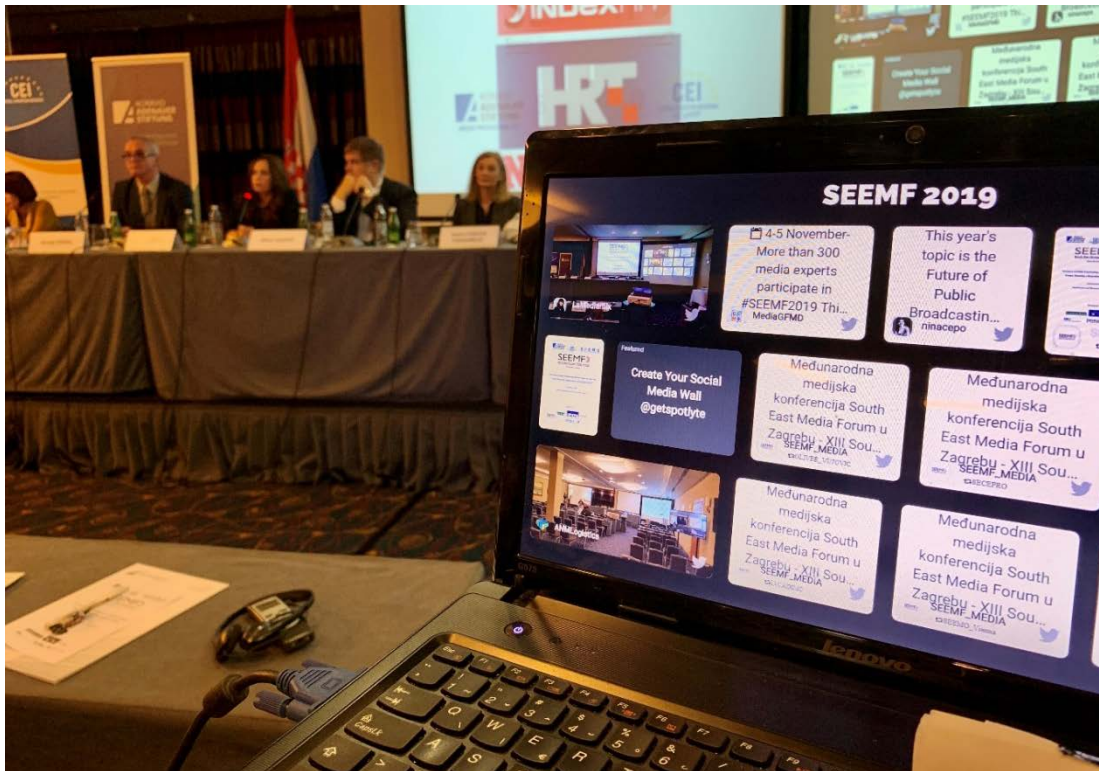




Event report

November 2019

Media Programme South East Europe



Journalists in South East Europe show fighting spirit and courage for change

At the XIII. „South East Europe Media Forum“ (SEEMF) in Zagreb challenges for public service and print media as well as possible solutions for the future were discussed

Darija Fabijanić

Political and financial independence of public service media, multimedia content in traditional media, challenges of the digital era and the future of print media were the topics of the XIII. South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF) on the 4th and 5th November in Zagreb. The most established media conference in South East Europe brought about 250 journalists, publishers, politicians and NGO representatives as well as some directors general of public service media to Croatia. The KAS Media Programme South East Europe hosts this media forum every year together with the South East European Media Organisation (SEEMO) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).

This year's SEEMF with the topic "The Future of Public Broadcasting and Print Media in South East Europe: Financing, Independency, New Business Models" was opened by **Oliver Vujović**, SEEMO Secretary General, **Nina Kudelja**, Deputy CEI Secretary General, and **Hendrik Sittig**, Head of the KAS Media Programme South East Europe. "A democracy cannot exist without free media. Journalists must be able to work independently – without political or economic influence or any other reprisals. In this system public service media play an important role," said Sittig. Some introductory words to the journalists in the audience were also been given by **Christian Halvorsen**, Deputy Head of Mission of the Norwegian Embassy in Zagreb: "Never lose sight of your task and keep your credibility and integrity."

The Croatian government was represented at the conference by the Minister of Culture **Nina Obuljen Koržinek** who said: "One of the biggest challenges is the decreasing professionalism in the whole media landscape." Thus she underlined that the Croatian EU Council presidency in the first half of 2020 will have as priorities the strengthening of media in the digital world, especially of the Croatian public service broadcaster (HRT).

"Journalists are disliked in Croatia"

Traditionally a discussion on media and politics in the host country, moderated by Oliver Vujović, followed. The public broadcaster HRT was also here a central subject of the discussion. "The current government does not like journalists, we only bother them. But we have to fight for our own freedom," said **Ilko Ćimić** from the online platform Index.hr. „We expect from the government not to bribe us, not to arrest us, not to sue us and not to destroy us economically." According to him, HRT is "a disgrace for whole Croatia." Other panellists agreed. Also **Zrinka Vrabec Mojzeš** from the weekly Nacional, for her the situation at the HRT is very bad and she points out that „we are moving with big steps to 1990s." **Vesna Karuza Podgorelec**, Project Manager for the Strategic Development at the HRT, confirmed

that there is pressure. Yet public service media are needed.

The President of the Croatian Journalist Association **Hrvoje Zovko** talked, apart from the situation at the HRT where he is suspended, about the general situation for journalists. Croatia is the single EU country where journalists can be sued for telling the truth. The criminal law on shaming and defamation enables this. The complicated media situation and the tense relationship with politics do not hinder journalists to keep fighting for independence. This was confirmed by **Sandra Križanec** from the TV channel N1. She added that more solidarity among journalists is needed.

Public service media are being criticised



Hendrik Sittig, Head of the KAS Media Programme presented the new book "A pillar of democracy on shaky ground – Public Service Media in South East Europe"

The discussions on public service media continued on the second day. The basis for the debates was the presentation of the new KAS book "A Pillar of Democracy on Shaky Ground – Public Service Media in South East Europe" which for the first time gives a complete overview of public service media in the region. Next to individual country chapters in the book there is a recent representative opinion poll which was presented by **Darija Fabijanić** from the KAS Media Programme South East Europe. For more than two-thirds of

media users public service media are important for a democratic society. In the same time, almost 65 percent see the public broadcasters under political influence. **Jean Philip de Tender**, Media Director at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), emphasised in his keynote speech that trust of the audience is important to be gained and be maintained.

The subsequent panel discussion on the public service media in South East Europe was moderated by **Radka Betcheva** from the EBU. "We don't have an up-to-date legal framework which can handle the information overload," says **Viktorija Car**, lecturer at the University of Zagreb. For her, public service media need to be a platform for lifelong learning. **Susanne Pfab**, Secretary General of the ARD, explained that she feels very privileged for the good legal framework in Germany. "Licence fees are the only possibility to keep public service media independent," said Pfab. This was endorsed by **Belmin Karamehmedović**, Director-General of the Bosnian National Broadcaster (BHRT). However, there shall be legal mechanism for sanctions if people do not pay their fee. Since in Bosnia a lot of citizens are not doing it, the broadcaster has financial difficulties. Funding is also one of the biggest challenges according to **Andrea Arežina Grgičević**, Editor-In-Chief of web portal and non-linear media services at HRT. "Nowadays we need to compete with streaming platforms like Netflix, but there is not enough money for this." She added that HRT is not only under financial and political pressure, but it is also exerted by different societal groups.

More courage to go digital

In the second panel of the day experts discussed how to face new challenges of the digital world and the information flow. The HRT journalist **Maja Sever** moderated the discussion on multimedia. "Newspaper die out. They need to transform to survive," explained **Agron Bajrami**, Editor-In-Chief of Kosovar daily Koha Ditore. Thus, his newspaper is going through a transformation process towards an integrated newsroom where all media segments (print, TV, internet) are merged. **Ivan Lovreček**, Managing Director of

the consultancy "Videoclick", encouraged this step. Media need to invest more into the digital market which is still very small in South East Europe. "Experiment, innovate, go digital – without trying you can't succeed," said Lovreček. **Franco de Filippo**, from the Italian news agency ANSA, explained that media users are "drunk" from sensation and normal texts aren't enough anymore. New formats are needed like infographics, pictures, videos to catch the audience's attention. However, panellists and participants saw the danger of decreasing quality.



Panellists discuss multimedia as a rescue package for traditional media

Jan Schulte-Kellinghaus, Programme Director, Berlin-Brandenburg Broadcasting (rbb), which already works with multimedia content for ten years, opposed: "Digital content is not unserious. It is still serious journalism. Just the production is different."

More courage for change and more usage of digital tools was also encouraged by **Martin Liss**, Media and Management Consultant from Berlin, in his Wake-Up-Talk "Ten things you always wanted to know about the future in media but never dared to ask". The main conclusion of his presentation was that the internet is not controllable. He explained to the journalists that they can't always have a big strategy, but have to perfect their articles and reports.

The last panel was dedicated to print media as a pillar of democracy. "Newspapers and magazines will survive since citizens still look for quality," said **Dražen Klarić**, Editor-in-Chief of Croatian daily Večernji list. Only the editorial offices of

print media have still enough time for researching and fact-checking. Without print media there is no survival of the democratic society. **Mauro Manzin** from Italian daily *Il Piccolo* emphasised as well the importance of print media as they have the biggest income from advertisements and thus make up the biggest part of their budget. The online versions of the print media unfortunately do not cover the journalists' salaries. **Ion Ionita** from the Romanian newspaper *Adevarul* explained that online and print versions work complimentary and only with both the broad audience can be reached. "Newspaper die. But what is not dying is good journalism," says Ionita. **Željko Ivanović**, Founder and President of the Board of Montenegrin *Vijesti*, had the opposite opinion: "Real journalism dies when print media dies." Thus, his media keeps the print version although readership decreases and online version as well as the TV channel are more successful. **Michael Martens**, Correspondent for South East Europe of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, moderated the discussion.



Numerous guests followed the discussions

In the end the organisers Nina Kudelja, Oliver Vujović und Hendrik Sittig thanked all panellists, moderators and guests for their active participation. The fighting spirit and the solidarity in the room was seen positive by participants. This was a huge motivation for the organisers. They promised to keep the tradition and to organise the South East Europe Media Forum also next year.

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