KAS brings the approach of Constructive Journalism for the first time to the Balkans

The Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organised from 16th to 19th September for the first time a workshop on Constructive Journalism in Prishtina/Kosovo. The seminar was hosted in cooperation with the "Constructive Institute" based in Aarhus/Denmark.

Manuela Zlateva

Journalists often write their reports in a negative or even in a partly dramatic tone. This goes along with the well-known journalistic rule: "Only bad news is good news!" According to current studies, many users develop a negative attitude about important social and political topics and feel helpless to make a change. The approach of Constructive Journalism tries to overcome this tendency by not only showing the negative sides of a problem, but commenting on positive aspects and solutions for the issue. By doing this, the media could portray a more objective and not one-sided picture of the reality. Furthermore, a positive tone in reporting helps to raise the interest and understanding of the readers, viewers and listeners as well as their willingness for change.

Hendrik Sittig, Head of the KAS Media Programme South East Europe, opened the workshop. He emphasised that it is important not only to report on news, but when there is time and place in the media, also on solutions for social problems. He is convinced that Constructive Journalism will gain further attention in the future – also in South East Europe – and is very pleased that KAS is discussing this topic for the first time in the region.

Henrik Grunnet, "Constructive Institute" fellow

In an introductory session, the participants – experienced journalists from Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Croatia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania – explained how they understand the term Constructive Journalism and what problems they see in its implementation. They also talked about the challenges for the media in South East Europe, such as political pressure and attacks on journalists.

Cynara Vetch, Coordinator for international projects at the "Constructive Institute", introduced her organisation. She explained that Constructive Journalism is future-oriented quality journalism which reports on important socio-political topics in an objective tone, based on facts and solutions. "When we are under constant stress, we have no room for new creative ways of thinking," she said. This also applies to the media. "If reporting is only negative, then citizens do not want to read and see news anymore," Vetch added.
The participants continued the discussion by giving many examples from their experience in political reporting. In their point of view, politicians are often not constructive enough, but stay

in the focus of the coverage. Media should therefore engage more in dialogue with decision-makers with constructive policy ideas. The journalists agreed that Constructive Journalism is not about positive or negative aspects of the news, but about the context and the mapping of all sides of a topic, in order to make the issues better understandable for the recipients. Vetch concluded that healthy media also means a healthy society and new approaches of quality journalism can support democracy.

Constructive journalism- theoretically good, but practically how?

Henrik Grunnet, Strategic Advisor and Fellow of the "Constructive Institute" presented various models of constructive journalism. He emphasised that the journalists should also report on progress and opportunities. This approach could help society to correct and readjust itself. "It is important the way how we report on solutions and their effects," Grunnet said. In the first aspect, journalists should ask themselves how to present solutions thereby informing the responsible institutions or people about it. The second dimension is the effort of journalists to report as objectively as possible, providing a balanced picture of the reality, in order to present many nuances of a problem. The third aspect of Constructive Journalism is the media taking an active role in the society by supporting the exchange of views among the public.

Best practice example from Germany – the ZDF show "Plan B"

The German journalist **Annette Hoth** of the public television ZDF showed, with the example of the programme "Plan B", how Constructive Journalism is applied in Germany. She talked about the challenges of developing a whole programme using this approach. In her view, the biggest challenge is to improve constantly your own work, in order to avoid equating with positive journalism and to be taken seriously by other colleagues. The participants discussed that sometimes it is difficult to persuade the management to try out new forms of journalism. Annette Hoth demonstrated how this is practically done at the ZDF and how important it is to reflect your own work

critically. The participants showed a lot of interest in the topic and were actively involved in the discussions. The seminar was designed very interactively by the trainers. Due to regional differences in South East Europe, they shared the opinion that participants should test in their own countries which elements of Constructive Journalism work best. Examples from international media were the basis for a lively discussion among the participants about what can and what cannot be implemented in the region. There was also an intense exchange on the difference between activism and journalism and the societal role of journalists. The participants were convinced to implement and try out the approach of Constructive Journalism in their daily journalistic work. After this first seminar on the topic and along the very productive cooperation with the "Constructive Institute", the KAS Media Programme South East Europe plans to pursue the approach next year again.