

Documentary

The lonely long-distance runners

Four media stories from the Balkans

Freedom of the press is always under pressure in Southeast Europe. Journalists are challenged daily, and investigative journalists in particular face threats and strategic lawsuits against public participation. On top of this, journalists have a hard time making a living, because of the small media market in the region. It makes them vulnerable to political and business influence, creating dependencies at the expense of independent journalism. Being a journalist

in Southeast Europe takes courage, idealism, and patience. In the documentary “The lonely long-distance runners”, journalists and media managers speak about their duty in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. The film follows them on their daily routines and encounters with organized crime, corruption, political pressure, and bureaucratic hassles. Once more it becomes clear that journalism is not just a profession, it is a calling.





„I found a note on my doorstep which read: It will continue until it is over. You cannot escape.“

Jelena Zorić is one of the best-known investigative journalists in **Serbia**. She has uncovered many scandals. However, the price she pays for this is very high. She and her family suffer - they are threatened, and they do not feel safe. Her parents also have their say.

Jelena Zorić works as a television journalist almost around the clock, she does not know what a day off is. In the film, she talks, among other things, about how she researched one of the country's biggest scandals about a huge marijuana plantation near Belgrade.



„Sometimes Mafia people walk up to your desk and smile at you.“

Investigative journalism is a matter of commitment but is also time-consuming. **Aleksandra Bogdani** knows the trick of the trade. She writes for the independent Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in **Albania**. The current state of freedom of the press in the country is poor. Most media outlets are in the hands of businessmen or political powers, and journalists

receive regular abuse. Rule of law is a sitting duck. Aleksandra Bogdani explains, for example, how the construction of a garbage incineration company is a factor in a conflict of interest that reaches the top of the government. However, instead of the corrupt politicians and businessmen, it is she and her colleagues who end up facing judges in the end.



“I was told that I don’t understand religion and that the bad guys will get their punishment in the after-life. That may be, but there is also a time on earth when you have to take responsibility for your actions.”

In **Romania**, the church still plays a central role. Church institutions try to put pressure on the media and prevent unwelcome reporting. **Diana Oncioiu, Vlad Stoicescu** and **Ovidiu Vanghele** from the alternative news platform **dela0.ro** regularly seek answers to the question of how much the Romanian

Orthodox Church and the state are involved. The law stipulates that the media may demand transparency and information about state affairs. But the influential church seems to enjoy a special status. Clergy protect each other - despite uncovered scandal about sexual abuse of priest students.



The Bulgarian National Radio with its regional programmes is a cornerstone within the Bulgarian media landscape. After an altercation, the former general manager of the National Radio is released from his position. **Anton Baltakov** decides to apply for the job, and succeeds. He leaves his life in New York behind and moves

back to his home country **Bulgaria**. But he quickly realises that age-old structures are hard to bring down, with idealism only. He is targeted by insinuations in the tabloids, threats and attempts of sabotage. The adventure turns out to be a chronicle of wishful thinking, which ends in disappointment.

„To me, it is clear that I had a too romantic idea of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian national radio.”





Written, filmed and directed by
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KAS Media Programme South East Europe

The regional media programme Southeast Europe by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has had a presence in Sofia since 2007. It covers ten countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Croatia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. The three core goals of the media programme are the further education of journalists, improving general conditions of journalism, developing the media landscape and professionalisation of political communication. For those reasons, the programme organizes conferences, workshops and seminars in cooperation with local and international partners. Furthermore, it scrutinizes and researches on the media landscape. The exchange of concepts, ideas and experience, and networking of media professionals are priority.

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