

The Press Council in BiH realized

Seminars "Public Persons and Public Interest – Responsibility and Communication with the Media"

Media between Freedom, Responsibility and Pressure

Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka and Brčko

September 2012

Bosnia and Herzegovina has good media legislature, but the application of these laws in practice is often lacking. This is one of the conclusions from the seminars "Public Personalities and Public Interest – Responsibility and Communication with the Media", organized by the **Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina** during September. The Seminars, held in Banja Luka, Brčko, Mostar and Sarajevo, gathered representatives from 20 political parties in BiH, as well as representatives of authorities, civil society organizations and media.

Journalists pointed out that it is very hard for the media to maintain their independence. They are often exposed to different kinds of pressures – from physical threats to taking in for questioning by the police and prosecution. However, the main problem all journalists claim to be is financial dependence. They felt that the profession is underestimated and journalists are underpaid. Most of them do not have social and health coverage and media is understaffed.

On the other hand, politicians noted that most media are biased. From their point of view, journalists, when working on a subject, should present all stands on a topic, and that is often not the case. Representatives of smaller and opposition parties believe that “the media serve the function of humiliating political opponents and cover up crimes and felonies of the public figures in ruling structures”.

Journalists, from their side, admit that the situation in the media is such that that media release information someone wants to be released and stress that media would be more critical of authorities if they were materially secured.

Another problem that was noted was the lack of political debate. Both media and politicians agreed that the political debates that are available in the media are not truly debates – they are often pre-directed and boring. The representatives of civil society organizations pointed out that there are virtually no debates on important things, such as EU and NATO accession.

A political debate can be hard to achieve in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, as some politicians openly boycott certain media or certain journalists and yet give a “privileged” status to others. Solidarity among journalists in situations such as this is virtually non-existent. It was concluded that this will have to change in order to move things from where they are right now.

Participants of the seminar also had the opportunity to hear what the practise of political communication in EU is like and what mechanism journalists have at their disposal to fulfil their main task – bringing timely, correct and unbiased information to audience.

In the end, journalists and politicians concluded that the application of the existing media legislature is necessary in order to achieve full media freedom and professionalism, but also further education of the journalists and the politicians, public figures. In many cases, inadequate communication and hate speech, are coming exactly from the public figures and politicians, and

media are only transferring. That is one way to combat hate speech, defamation and discrimination in public communication.

Participants in the Seminar were called by the representatives of the **Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina** to exercise their civil right and complain against unprofessional reporting in print and online media, especially against hate speech which is a serious breach of the Press Code of BiH and of the criminal laws in force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Series of seminars "Public Persons and Public Interest – Responsibility and Communication with the Media" was organized in cooperation with **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung** in BiH.