

THE PRESS COUNCIL IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

realized

THE LEGAL LEAKS WORKSHOP FOR JOURNALISTS FROM BIH

“FREEDOM OF INFORMATION: STRENGTHENING JOURNALISM”

Sarajevo, June 10 - 11, 2014

The Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully realized the Legal Leaks Workshop for journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina “Freedom of Information: Strengthening Journalism”. The two day workshop, held on the 10th and 11th of June 2014 in Sarajevo, was organized in cooperation with the European Commission, UNESCO, the organization Access Info Europe and SEENPM.

Journalists and media are often faced with barriers to accessing information, especially if the information regards corruption, organized crime, human rights breaches and other sensitive issues of journalism coverage. Why is it important for journalists to exercise their right to access information in their everyday work; what is the practice of implementing the Law on access to information in Bosnia and Herzegovina; how can media obtain information from the European Union; how to use open data bases, and how to present the obtained data while respecting ethics and professional standards of the Press Code of BiH - were the key question addressed by the Legal Leaks workshop.

The Right to Access Information - the basic human right

The importance and actuality of the topic was proven by the significant number of participants - The Legal Leaks workshop gathered 43 journalists and editors of print, electronic and online media, bloggers, and representatives of the associations of “alarmists” and “whistle blowers”. The panelists were Ms. Ljiljana Zurovac, Executive Director of the Press Council in BiH; Ms. Adeline Hulin, UNESCO Department for freedom of research and media development; Ms. Helen Darbshire, Executive Director of Access Info Europe; Ms. Maja Brankovic, Transparency International; Ms. Borka Rudic, Association BH Journalists; Mr. Aladin Abdagic, Center for Investigative Journalism and Ms. Slobodanka Dekic, Media Center Sarajevo.

- The right to access information is the basic human right. The European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg, in 2009 recognized the right to access information as a basic human right, protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Essential Freedoms. The Committee for Human Rights of the United Nations confirmed in 2011 that the freedom of expression, protected by Article 19 of the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, includes the right to access information. In the OSCE region, 48 out of 56 countries members, including BiH, have specific laws on the right to access information - stated Ms. Helena Darbshire, Executive Director of the Organization Access Info Europe.

Emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression, Ms. Ljiljana Zurovac, Executive Director of the Press Council in BiH, warned about the tendency of “completely misinterpreting the right to access information and the freedom to information”, and about the increasing pressures on media and professional media coverage.

- We are receiving an ever increasing number of complaints, in the first five months of this year we have received 273 complaints, while during the entire year of 2013 we received 205. It is a good thing that there are more and more complaints, it is very good to have a reader audience that recognized breaches of the Press Code of BiH, but just as well we have cases of inappropriate practices of media freedom. Through the work of the Press Council in BiH, using self-regulation principles, we must actively resist the threats to media freedom - said Ms. Zurovac.

Tool for Protecting Media Freedom

The practical implementation of the Law on Freedom of Access to Information in BiH was addressed by Ms. Borka Rudic, Secretary General of the Association BH Journalists, and Ms. Maja Brankovic from Transparency International BiH. As the key problems, Ms. Rudic noted the difficult access to information, especially information that could be incriminating for leading government officials; interference of police and other security agencies in the delivery of information; vaguely defined penalties; and the lack of readiness for delivery of information. Ms. Brankovic pointed to the need for harmonizing the state and entity laws on the freedom of access to information, with the goal of avoiding legal insecurity; the need for harmonizing the legislation on freedom of access to information with other laws, in order to prevent conflict of laws, especially with the Law on Personal Data Protection; and about the need for determining sanctions for violators of the legal provisions in entity laws.

Mr. Aladin Abdagic, Journalist of the Center for Investigative Journalism, and Ms. Slobodanka Dekic from the Media Center Sarajevo, spoke about data journalism and data base analysis technology. Participants of the workshop were also acquainted with the procedure for submitting requests to access information in the European Union, as well as with the newest statistical data about citizens' complaints about the coverage of the press and online media.

The goal of the Legal Leaks workshop was to empower journalists to use their right to access information in everyday work, as a tool for defending media freedom and human rights, thus enabling the participation of the public in decision making and calling the government to responsibility towards the public interest. Also, the participants obtained useful guidelines and advice as to how to efficiently use the opportunities provided by the Laws on Access to Information in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the national version of the [Legal Leaks](#)

[Guidebook](#)

(as of

yet only available in BHS)

, which presents a detailed guide on how to submit requests for free access to information in 45 out of 56 OSCE member states.

[The Press Clipping of publication relating to the Workshop can be read here.](#)