

## Press Freedom and Media in Europe

### Coverage of European topics and the upcoming elections in the Visegrád states

Brussels, 07 March 2019

With the elections to the European Parliament less than two months away, the EU office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung invited together with its office in Prague young journalists from the Visegrád states for a two days dialogue programme to Brussel in order to scrutinise coverage of European topics during the upcoming elections in central and Eastern Europe. Respectively two journalists from each Visegrád member, namely Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, had the opportunity to dive into the EU media world and engage in inspiring discussions with representatives from EU institutions, European media channels and non-profit organisations.

Zuzana Sutchlíková, head of the Europeum office in Brussels, which is in fact the only Czech think tank based in Brussels, offered an introduction to the organisational set-up and the textual work of the V4. She pointed out that Brexit will arguably reshuffle EU leadership and thus unleashes new power dynamics between the V4. Furthermore, the young journalists discussed the low

electoral turnout in many Eastern European countries with special regards to the rather superficial media coverage of European subjects in the V4. There was broader consensus that in order to boost attention for EU issues, national subjects, and particularly economic matters, must be better connected to the EU-level to demonstrate how the two relate to one another.



*Young Journalists from the Visegrád States.*

After the group participated in the daily Midday Briefing of the European Commission, the journalists met with representatives from both the European Federation of Journalists as well as the

International Federation of Journalists. One of the most contentious points of discussion presented the working conditions of young journalists across the world with a strong emphasis on concerns of press freedom and pluralism. Ricardo Gutiérrez from the EFJ introduced hereof the “Media Pluralism Monitor” as a useful tool for evaluating the state of press freedom in all European countries, including Turkey and Russia. The monitor shows, however, that even several European countries struggle to live up to press freedom and media pluralism. On this matter, Ernest Sagaga from the IFJ emphasised that soft diplomacy and raising public awareness present up today the most promising tools in standing up for press freedom, pluralism and impunity. Moreover, Alberto Fernandez motivated the role of Unions in fighting for just working conditions for print and especially digital media journalists in Europe.



*Journalists visit the Permanent Representation of Slovakia.*

The group concluded the first day with a visit at the Permanent Representation of Slovakia, where the young journalists had the chance to discuss Slovakia’s current V4 agenda with Lubica Karvašová, third secretary for COREPER II coordination. In addition to the Slovak priorities of the

“Dynamic Visegrad for Europe” agenda and the upcoming transition to the Czech Presidency in June 2019, the group discussed a potential reshuffle of seats in the European Parliament and the elections impact on the V4 group.

The second day of the dialogue programme took off with a meeting at the Directorate-General REGIO of the European Commission on the current developments of regional and cohesion policy in the EU. Underscoring the need for outreach, transparency and accountability, Josef Schwarz of the Unit Czech Republic and Slovakia highlighted that the EU will prioritise digital economy, e-governance and sustainable climate policy in the next budget to improve regional infrastructure and take on structural inequalities within Europe. Exemplary he mentioned modernising ERDF, CF and ESF+ for the next multiannual financial framework as important tools to realise this ambitious endeavour.

After having discussed working methods and campaign priorities of the S&D group with Senior Policy Advisor Tanja Bergrath and a subsequent visit at the EU Parliamentarium, the group concluded the programme with a visit at Politico EU office, where Jan Cienski, Senior Policy Editor for Energy, Environment and Transport at Politico, introduced the journalists to the thematic focus and structural set up of the journal. Overall, the journalists concluded two insightful days with a lot of input for their future coverage of the European election in the following month.

by Dominik Rehbaum

