



Eurolang

Eastern Europe: New media network reaches out to eleven countries

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Brussels 22/10/01, by Margret Oberhofer

A new association called 'Netzwerk - Initiative deutschsprachiger Medien' (Initiative German media) covering television, radio and printed media, was founded recently in Lubowitz, in the Polish area of Silesia. Even if the organiser wants to keep membership open for everybody, so far mainly minority media from eleven countries are participating. 'Our main aim is first of all to have a common platform for German media abroad. We would also like to exchange information, to provide further education and exchange journalists throughout Europe', says Urban Beckmann, coordinator of the project. He is media coordinator for the Institute of Foreign Relations (ifa) in Polish Oppeln/Opole, which runs the project presently. The network is under the patronage of the European Ethnic Broadcasting Association (EEBA), fighting for minority TV-programming. So far the network spreads over the countries of Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republik, Russia, Rumania, Poland, Italy, Belgium as well as the Baltic provinces and Kaliningrad/Königsberg.

For Igor Sarembo, Editor of 'Königsberger Express' in the north Russian city of Kaliningrad/Königsberg, the network is a bridge to German print media in Europe. 'To tell you the truth we do feel isolated right now. We face a lot of challenges that we can only cope with through our personal input. We are lacking networks and cooperation's that could support our business and also bring new chances', Sarembo tells Eurolang.

Also for Hans Frank from the 'Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumänien' (ADZ) in Bucharest, the importance of the network is to bring fresh input. 'A cooperation like this can re-animate and strengthen the contact between German media which 'fell asleep' after the political turn in Eastern Europe.' The ADZ appears five times a week in 4,500 copies. The readers are mainly from the 150,000 German-speaking population in Rumania. 'But we also want to attract business men from the German-speakers abroad, diplomats and tourists', Frank tells Eurolang.

Apart from exchanging ideas, the discussion about technical aspects and financing is also very important. 'Our newspaper is completely a private establishment; we do not have sponsors. Because of the financial situation issues like buying new software, computers or having our own homepage are very difficult for us. Therefore we also hope that an improvement of the technical equipment through the cooperation is possible', says Sarembo.

In a long run the network also plans to lobby at the European institutions for common projects. 'So we can also promote minority rights in countries where the situation for minorities is not so good', Beckmann says.

Cooperation in technical matters, lobbying at European institutions, exchanging information and journalists are also the aims of MIDAS, the European cooperation of minority dailies. Günther Rautz, project manager of MIDAS, was present on the foundation conference of 'Netzwerk - Initiative deutschsprachiger Medien', to inform about MIDAS' programme. 'Our activities got a lot of interest, because we have basically the same ideas,' Rautz says. 'The only difference is that we are an association for minority dailies in different languages and the Network is for TV, radio and printed media in the German language.'

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But according to Beckmann, this fact should change sooner or later. 'We want to have similar networks also for other medias, not only for German. For example the different minorities in Poland could also cooperate in a similar association.'

Further details of the project will be discussed in Eupen in Belgium in February 2002. 'All in all, we have a lot of ideas, but we are still at the beginning,' Sarembo summarizes. (EL)