European Centre for Press and Media Freedom

Press Release

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom founded in Leipzig

Leipzig, 24th June 2015.

Representatives of 20 journalists associations, publishing houses, academic institutions, trade unions and media rights experts from many European countries have founded the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) in Leipzig today. Based in Leipzig a team of six starts working after the Centre has now been established as an independent non-profit European Co-operative Society (SCE).

The co-operative's mission is to unite Europe's highly fragmented media freedom community and to address media freedom violations in EU member states and beyond. Violations of press freedom will be observed, researched, registered and continuously reported to both the public and the political spheres. The ECPMF will work as a registration office, and as contact point for organizations and individuals.

Henrik Kaufholz, is head of the Danish investigation initiative SCOOP and appointed the first Chairman of the Executive Board. He states the ambitious aim of the Centre: "The Centre is meant to be the lighthouse of press freedom in Europe. It will bring together different initiatives and promote closer co-operation among European activists. We will strive for common standards of media freedom across Europe."

Board Member Ljiljana Smajlović, Head of the Serbian Journalists' Union stresses the urgent need for institutions that will heed the warnings of journalists on the ground and urges Brussels to listen too. "Many violations of media freedom are under the radar of European politicians."

"We are very happy about the success of this initiative that everyone has worked very hard to achieve" says Hans-Ulrich Jörges, Editor in Chief for Special Affairs at the publishing house Gruner+Jahr.

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

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"This European Co-operative Society can operate independently across the whole of Europe due to its special structure."

Stephan Seeger, Managing Director of the Leipzig Sparkasse Media Foundation, says: "Leipzig as the nucleus of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 is the ideal location to establish the ECP. Tens of thousands of Leipzig citizens protested against the communist state and demanded freedom of the press. In addition, the Media Campus - located in walking distance - with the latest communication technology and flexible room solutions offers optimal conditions to host the centre and to organise its workshops, seminars and meetings".

Amongst the founding member organisations are the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the regional branch of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which has 600.000 members worldwide. The campaigning organisation Index on Censorship also joins as a founding member. With the Russian Mass Media Defence Centre and academic institutions from Greece to Portugal, the Co-operative includes a wide spread of different interests in the legal, journalistic, academic and freedom of information communities.

The following distinguished persons have been appointed to the board:

Executive Board

- Chair of the Board: Henrik Kaufholz, Head of Scoop, Denmark
- Vice-Chair of the Board: Hans-Ulrich Jörges, Co-editor of Stern, Editor-in-chief for Special Affaires, Gruner+Jahr, Germany
- Dirk Voorhoof, Professor of International Media Law, Ghent University, Belgium
- Galina Arapova, Head of Mass Media Defence Initiative, Russia
- Liljana Smaijlovic, Head of Serbian Journalist´s Union, Republic of Serbia
- Christoph Keese, Executive Vice President, Axel Springer SE, Germany
- Stephan Seeger, Executive Member of the Board, Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig, Germany
- Mogens B. Bjerregaard, President of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Supervisory Board

- Chair of the Board: Balázs Nagy Navarro, Freelance Journalist, Hungary
- Vice –Chair of the Board: Margo Smit, Director, Dutch-Flemish Association of Investigative Journalists, VVOJ, The Netherlands
- Kerstin Mey, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, Westminster University, United Kingdom
- Harald Langenfeld, Chair of the Executive Board, Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig, Germany
- Naser Selmani, Head of the Union of Macedonian Journalists, Macedonia/Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Vesselin Dimitrov, Deputy Editor-in-chief, Forbes, Bulgaria
- Gavin MacFadyen, Head of the Centre for Investigative Journalism, United Kingdom
- George Pleios, Professor, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece
- Esad Hecimovic, Investigative Journalist, Editor at OBN TV, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In a worldwide perspective, the ECPMF is unique in its dimension, structure and ambition. The Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig has devoted two years of intensive work to the development of the ECPMF and applied successfully in close collaboration with partners from three other European countries and has now been awarded a grant for 2015/2016 of 750.000 Euro from the European Commission.

The project partners are:

- Journalismfund.eu, a Europe-wide initiative for investigative journalists headquartered in Zellik (Belgium)
- Institute of European Media Law (EMR), a Europe-wide network of over 180 legal experts based in Saarbrücken (Germany)
- Journalists' and monitoring organisation Ossigeno per l'informazione based in Rome (Italy)
- Thing Tank and Online Journal Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, headquartered in Rovereto (Italy)
- South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO) based in Vienna (Austria)

Additional major financial supporters for the first year of the ECPMF are the City of Leipzig, the German Foreign Ministry and the Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig. On the occasion of the founding assembly of the ECPMF the State Chancellery of Saxony handed over a donation of 100.000 Euro to support the initiative.

From its very early stages, the setting-up of the project was intensively supported by Hans-Ulrich Jörges, Member of the Editorial Board of the magazine STERN and editor-in-chief of Special Affairs of the publishing house Gruner + Jahr and Christoph Keese, Executive Vice-President of Axel Springer AG .

An all-party initiative from the European Parliament led by its President Martin Schulz supported the idea of the European Centre. Among the supporters within the European Parliament are the vice-president of the EP, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff and the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Elmar Brok.

ECPMF's activities will be based on activities that promote the spirit and the values of the European Charter for Press Freedom signed in 2009 by 48 editors-in-chief and leading journalists from 19 countries and subsequently notified to the European Commission.

To prove the European scale of activities right from the beginning, the project partners of the ECPMF will have a meeting with the president of the European Parliament Martin Schulz on 30th of June followed by a discussion and press conference in the European Parliament that brings together experts on press freedom, prominent journalists and media policy researchers in order to consider these issues and highlight the struggles on the ground.

The Press Kit with substantial background information is available here:

www.j.mp/ecpmf-press_01

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