

Workshop in Germany: the Media and Public Relations. Let's Change the Climate of Public Opinion!



Europe & Middle East Region launches the Media & Communications Department.

Vienna, Jan 12. 2018 - On the first weekend of January (5. - 7. 2018), over 60 members from 18 countries attended a media workshop in Camberg, Germany. The workshop was entitled: *“Media, Public Relations, Communication & Legal Affairs”*. Amongst the participants were seasoned journalists and bloggers as well as enthusiastic members who want to engage in media work. Fourteen young participants, or so called „digital natives“, gave valuable insights into the world of the new media. The facilities were very suitable for the purpose of this meeting, and the experienced staff at Camberg extended us their warm hospitality.

Changing the „Opinion Climate“

Recently we read a lot about the effects of „climate change“ and the destruction of the environment which endangers the future of mankind. Yet few people are aware of the pollution of the “opinion climate” produced by the media. Our movement and our activities have often been severely handicapped due to the unfavorable opinion climate towards religion and in particular, minority religions.

Rev. Moon was treated especially unfairly by the press. Early members remember the time when the first negative newspapers and television reports appeared, resulting in a dramatic drop in witnessing results. In order to reverse the negative image and to create favorable conditions for witnessing, we first need to change the opinion of the media. This is a difficult but not an impossible task. Thanks to True Mother's support, the Media & Communications

Department for the **Region of Europe & the Middle East**¹ (EUME) was nominally established in November 2017.

Launching the Media & Communications Department

Peter Zoehrer has been working intensely for over fifteen years with the social and mainstream media on religious freedom issues. Together with his FOREF Europe² team of experts, he has scored numerous victories in Austria and the region. On November 1st, Peter was appointed director of this new department. He is optimistic: *“The timing for the kick-off of our regional media work is perfect. If we can establish a well-trained media team soon enough, we shall be prepared to promote True Mother’s speech in Vienna in April.”*

Dr. Michael Balcomb³, chairman of the EUME region, expressed great confidence that we can improve the public image of our movement in the region. *„I would like to see during the first months of 2018, every country in our region appoint a media-officer who can collaborate with this department to reach out to the wider public. True Parents’ message and the great work of our providential organizations should not remain unknown anymore to society at large.*

Let’s get the good news out! Most importantly, we need to serve society by giving a providential perspective on how to solve the numerous problems which confront us today. That is actually the providential role of the media in this day and age.”

In the past, many idealistic individuals carried out great media, PR and legal work in their nations. But there was little communication, and during the last two decades - with the exception of the „Schengen Committee“ – there was no regional coordination or networking. Now things have changed. With Heaven’s decree and after two 40-day prayer conditions in 2017, we are now more than ready to start a new and united front of media work in the vast region called Europe and the Middle East, reaching from Iceland to Vladivostok.

The program

Already before breakfast on Saturday, some excellent good practice reports were offered by representatives from Albania, Hungary and Austria. The main program began with a short and powerful keynote speech given by the regional chairman, Dr. Michael Balcomb.

Peter Zoehrer spoke about the *Role of the Media in the Realization of CIG*. In his presentation he gave a brief outline of the proposed future work of the media department. The next presenter was Barbara Grabner, an experienced journalist and press speaker from Austria who gave a presentation about the “Spiral of Silence”⁴ explaining how the media influences or manipulates public opinion.

¹ Europe & Middle East Region includes also Eurasia. The region includes 6 affiliated regions: Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Central Europe (Eurasia), Western Europe, Southern Europe and Middle East.

² FOREF Europe (Forum for Religious Freedom - Europe) is a Vienna based secular and independent human rights organization with the special focus on FoRB - Freedom of Religion or Belief (Web: foref-europe.org).

³ Dr. Balcomb has had extensive experience in media-work over many years in USA.

⁴ Groundbreaking book from Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann „The Spiral of Silence“.

This is a classic and a „must read“ for anyone working in the media field or in advocacy who wishes to create a better world.

Mr. Mark Brann⁵ gave an overview of legal actions the UK and Europe from the 1970s up until the present day. He gave an in-depth account of the incredible efforts which were the background to numerous victories.

Presentations and interactive-interview coaching by Mr. Richard Biddlecombe were major features of the workshop. Richard has worked for decades with the British media, and his latest achievement as a writer is the publication of his autobiography in form of a novel⁶. His presentations had exiting topics⁷, lots of practical examples and profound insights into the world of mainstream media and how journalists tick, on how to approach them and what topics attract their interest.

Very enjoyable was the exercise with cross-fire or speed interviews involving all participants in changing roles – as a journalist asking uncomfortable questions, then as an interviewee who is put on the spot. This exercise had us moving and laughing a lot, even if we had to often raise our voices to be heard against the background volume of noisy chatter!

Richard and his lovely wife Monika are a great team and participants, as expressed in their reflections and evaluations, were touched by the way they organized this inter-active media coaching session.

In the afternoon, we heard more good practice reports: Tony Cook from Vienna, an experienced publisher, gave tips how to do use various media tools. Fantastic work is being done by Yulian Marianov from Bulgaria who created over 50 blogs and virtually pushed out negative reports from the internet. James Powell gave insight into his work with U-Tube and Google ranking. Johann Brunnbauer explained how the attitude of the authorities⁸ changed after our church received official recognition in Austria.

The Korean Connection

The organizers were happy that two key persons from our Korean media team were able to attend. Mr. Ho-yeol An, the senior director of the PR department, explained how they achieved substantial changes in media reporting and public opinion in recent years and showed graphs to give empiric evidence of positive media coverage. Even more interesting was to hear the background stories and how they work with the mainstream media. Results come from the hard work of meeting journalists, rather than miracles.

Steve Sakuwa, assistant director of the Korean media department, has a brilliant command of the English language and served as translator for Mr. An. Numerous participants expressed their gratitude to the Korean team for having come to Europe to share their story.

And from his side, Mr. Ho-yeol An was inspired by the enthusiasm of the participants. He

⁵ Mr. Brann is professional attorney who has scored several victories on behalf of our movement in the UK. He was acting as an essential legal consultant during the „Schengen case“ against True Parents' entry ban (1995), which was successfully defeated in a German High Court in 2007.

⁶ „Edwin's Exploits“ a novel by Richard Biddlecombe (now available at AMAZON).

⁷ Topics: „Why bother with the media?“, „Media Interview Techniques“, „Speed Interviews“, Press releases and contacting journalists“, „Miscellaneous bits and pieces and discussion - impact of social media on traditional media and a couple of short video clips“.

⁸ The Unification Movement in Austria has been for over 40 years (since 1974) without legal recognition. After 4 decades of persecution by the state, mainstream churches and the media the leaders and members decided to apply for an official status as a confessional community. Finally, after a 4 years testing period (by the ministry of culture) the legal status has been granted by the authorities in June 2015, one month after True Mothers visit to Vienna. UC of Austria is now the 8th confessional community registered by the state.

said that similar media departments should be established on all continents and promised his future support for our media team here in Europe.

Outlook

Peter Zoehrer is confident: *“Our task is huge, but we shall establish ongoing communication with media representatives in the region. We shall assist all nations to make press releases and provide media coverage before and after providential events. Another priority is to identify and recruit talented people from amongst our youth and involve them in our social media work.”*

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Balcomb again emphasized the paramount importance of media work: *„True Mother has asked me whether I believe that we can reach over 7 billion people on this planet... I firmly believe that we can only do it with the help of social media as well as the mainstream media. The very purpose of this workshop is to initiate this process! “*