

## UPF Austria: Traditional and Social Media in times of Digitalization, Fake News and Artificial Intelligence

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On May 4, 2024, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) Austria, together with the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna (UNCAV), hosted a breakfast meeting with media representatives to mark World Press Freedom Day on the topic: "Traditional and Social Media in times of Digitalization, Fake News and Artificial Intelligence".

On December 20 1993, the United Nations General Assembly declared May 3 to be World Press Freedom Day (or simply World Press day), observed to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and marking the anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, a statement of free press principles put together by African newspaper journalists in Windhoek in 1991.



After a delicious breakfast buffet, Peter Haider, President of UPF Austria, welcomed the approximately 60 participants to the conference.

Dato Abdalla Sharief, President of the UNCAV, spoke about the history and significance of UN Press Freedom Day; a day when we should remember that journalists' voices must not come under pressure and their rights must not be violated. He quoted UN Secretary-General António Guterres' words at the previous year's Press Freedom Day celebration in the UNO building in Vienna:



"Without freedom of the press, there is no freedom. A free press is essential, and a sine qua non for freedom."



After a piano recital, Eli, Eli by Lora Bocheva, John Herzog, member of the board of the Austrian Journalists' Club, came to word. He recounted that when Press Freedom Day was mentioned at an event the previous day at the St. Marx cemetery, a singer-songwriter caught everybody's attention with the startling statement that the press should be raised from their graves. (or does he mean would rise from the grave?) As a journalist and cultural bridge builder, Herzog sees music as the best message of peace supporting the work of the press. He used a wooden box containing a newspaper to symbolise freedom of the press, an 'imprisoned' human being and a pane of glass that is broken by a stone to illustrate his words. "Put the pieces back together properly" was the task he gave the audience.



Hubert Huber, who trains young journalists said: "Working with young people aspiring to be journalists and experiencing their enthusiasm is very stimulating. In the past, you had to search for information, and newspapers, readers and even politicians were dependent on this flow of news. Today we are bombarded with information and hardly get a chance to think." The profession of journalism has changed from "gatekeeper" to "gatewatcher", a sorter. It is important to get an overview of the flood of information and to ask: "What information do I pass on to my readers?"

In the past, topicality and exclusivity were very important, but the advent of social media makes it very difficult or even impossible for journalists to remain at the forefront. The flow of information is

very fragmented and often consists of headlines and it has become the journalist's job to work out the connections.

Tanya Kayhan, President of Oxus TV (Media, Integration, Culture) spoke about the effects of propaganda and fake news in social media and her experience in conveying news from her new homeland (Austria) to her country of origin (Persia). One of her last reports was about the way in which the important Persian spring festival Nouruz, is celebrated in Austria.

Dr. Jakob Staubmann, founder of MENA Editors Network, spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence (AI). Researchers, developers and entrepreneurs from all over the world are developing AI systems which can learn, reason, perceive, understand, interact and even create. Computers will become more autonomous and intelligent, and humans may well become lazy as a result. We also must deeply consider questions of ethics and responsibility, and many rules, such as those for use in military operations, still need to be negotiated. Caution is needed since information does not only flow from independent sources. AI is used in journalism to detect fake news and fake images.



Dr. Leo Gabriel, television journalist and filmmaker, quoted Karl Kraus (media critic 1874-1936), who observed that in his day it was the 200 media owners and 'editors', rather than journalists who had total freedom to determine what appeared in the media. Another "sacred cow", objectivity in journalism can lead to dehumanization. Bringing people to life means giving a voice to those affected personally. Journalists are then not just observers, but participants. We are in a bubble, being used as parties in a state of conflict or war. But journalists must be impartial, and to communicate with all those involved. That is the task of journalism.



Sebastian Zhurkov from the Austrian Youth Press, an organisation dedicated to supporting young media professionals, expressed youthful enthusiasm and passion for journalism. Freedom of the press is more than a pragmatic ideal. It is an essential foundation of our democratic, civilized society. Austria has been downgraded from 29th to 32nd in the global index after having been in the top ten for a long time. Independent and critical thinking and dealing with sensitive topics is the task of youth journalism, even if this provokes resistance. The youth press is a platform for exchange, further education and networking. "We want to create a world in which truth-finding and justice are not only aspired to but can also be realised."

A few questions to the speakers and comments from the audience followed the presentations before the audience was treated to a musical finale, coordinated by Mrs. Saschka Zhurkov, UNCAV. Soprano Ruriko Nakano sang an aria from Franz Lehar and a Japanese folk song, accompanied Kaori Saeki on the piano.