

# COMMUNICATING EUROPE

## MAKING THE EU

## UNDERSTANDABLE



### **2nd Training in Kyiv at “Communicating Europe – Making the EU Understandable” Summary on “How to sell EU stories to your editor (and to the public)?”**

Lecture given by Edit Inotai, Senior fellow of CEID, Hungary, former Berlin Correspondent and Foreign Editor of daily Népszabadság,  
Kyiv, 29 September 2017

EU-reporting is usually considered boring and technical by many journalists and editors. Stories about the shape of a cucumber, the standard size of chicken cages or the energy efficiency of light bulbs are often quoted as examples of how EU journalism is overregulated. However, intelligent, objective and creative reporting about the EU exists and is completely different. Since media still impacts opinions on political, economic and social issues, it remains vital to have quality reporting on international politics and on the community where your country belongs to or intends to belong.

In the PPT lecture I highlighted the most important challenges of EU reporting: storyline, background, sources and timing. I started with a short historical overview of the times before Hungary’s accession, recalling the opportunities and study trips offered for journalists, the media landscape and the overall positive approach towards the EU. It is always crucial to distinguish between journalism and propaganda, therefore I quoted the official, rather dull governmental messages promoting EU accession and contrasted them with the independent media’s approach. It is worth remembering that the EU - at that time, from the outside - was a somewhat idealized institution.

As soon as Hungary entered the EU, it became evident that it would be a difficult marriage. Journalists reporting on the EU became overwhelmed with information, whilst editors faced difficulty properly placing EU articles. The human interest narratives, which generally help sell a story, were missing in most cases. Translating EU decision-making and defending national interests inside the community became challenges for the media and politicians. In the meantime, the general media crisis hit major European newspapers forcing them to close their offices in Brussels. As a consequence, most media outlets operate without a correspondent in Brussels. Finally, I touched upon the current Hungarian government’s focus and the Brussels bashing campaign, the reaction of the critical press and its impact on the society.

So, how do you cover the EU without correspondents and how do you effectively counterbalance government propaganda? To deal with these challenges, I recommended finding good stories, identifying sources, listing reliable foreign newspapers and I suggested specific experts and think tanks they can turn to, in order not to copy paste texts but to create their own stories.

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The lecture was fully interactive. The hottest topic was the controversial language law on minority language education passed by the Ukrainian parliament recently, and the Hungarian reactions to it. The journalists were very interested in the Hungarian media's opinion on this law and the current media landscape, including ownership issues. There were questions about the Hungarian political scene, the upcoming elections, the role Hungary is playing in the EU and the future of the Visegrad cooperation.

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