

employment of new technologies. She furthermore recommended to establish a crisis committee to detect crises in the Western Balkans food systems at an early stage, to reduce the VAT (Value added tax) on certain products or to exempt them from custom duties. Additionally, she called for special attention on the speculation regarding food prices currently visible in the Western Balkans.

On a global scale, *Brodersen* argued to keep markets open and to abstain from using products needed in agricultural production for political leverage, such as spare parts for machinery products from Germany, which Russia depends on, as this would only aggravate the global food situation. He suggests that countermeasures against Russia's policies could be the diversification of energy supplies, an endeavor

in which the EU should support also the Western Balkans, as well as the easing of agritrade between the EU on the one side and the Western Balkans and Moldova on the other side to counteract Russia's position as an important consumer of certain goods.

*Cramon-Taubadel* argued that in the long run we will have to change our consumption patterns to relax the situation on global food markets, with less consumption of meat, which would in turn reduce the demand for grain as fodder. However, as consumption behavior cannot be changed immediately, governments should in the meantime provide targeted aid to poor households. Currently, products are scarce, which is why the question of distribution will inevitably arise.

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## Award Ceremony

# Solidarity Award 2022 for Journalists from Southeast Europe

**Organizer: Southeast Europe Association**

**Location: German Bundestag in Berlin with online live transmission, 7 July 2022**

**Report by Wladimir Dirksen, München**

In a ceremony at the German Bundestag the Serbian journalist *Ivana Gordić Perc* was awarded the Solidarity Award of the Southeast Europe Association in honor of her courageous investigation about the exploitation of Vietnamese workers at the construction site of the Chinese tire factory Linglong International Europe Ltd in Zrenjanin, Serbia.<sup>1</sup>

The SOG Solidarity Award, which was first granted in 2021, honors courageous journalists from Southeast Europe who often expose themselves to great personal risks due to their critical reporting. It aims to celebrate their outstanding work and to recognize their contribution to the promotion of democracy, rule of law and freedom of the press. The award is also intended to

contribute to the protection of journalists on the ground through the public attention it attracts and to honor the great achievements of the award winners. With the award, the SOG wants to demonstrate that it stands by those who speak up for our European values such as freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The award is financed entirely through donations.

The winner of the Solidarity Award in 2022 *Ivana Gordić Perc* works at VOICE (the Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center) and has more than 20 years of experience in newspaper and radio journalism. She started her career in 1999 on Radio Zrenjanin from where she moved to the legendary Radio Coyote. In 2021, she uncov-

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1 See also *Ivana Gordić Perc's* article in this issue, pp. 59–64 (editor's note).

ered the story about the inhumane and forceful working conditions in which around 500 Vietnamese workers were employed at the construction site of the Chinese Linglong tire factory in Zrenjanin, Serbia. This story caused a lot of media attention both in Serbia and internationally, including a debate in the European Parliament and the United Nations. Due to her reporting, Gordić Perc was faced with a lot of pressure and threats from those who tried to cover up the whole case. In 2022, Gordić Perc received the Annual Award for Investigative and Analytical Journalism of the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (IJAV) for this story. Despite being the mother of three children, she is fearless in her journalistic work, which in her case is often accompanied by threats, especially when investigating corruption at the local level.

The welcome address of the award ceremony was delivered by the president of the Southeast Europe Association and German Federal Government Special Representative for the Countries of the Western Balkans, *Manuel Sarrazin*, as well as *Josip Juratovic*, the Vice President of the Southeast Europe Association and MP of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). *Sarrazin* underlined that the threats towards the award recipient do not go unnoticed and that the high-ranking attendees of the award ceremony want to emphasize that Gordić Perc has supporters not only in the academic and journalistic establishment working on Southeast Europe in Germany, but with the personal expression of support from German policymakers also within the Bundestag and government. *Sarrazin* honoured the awardee's lifelong journalistic achievements in that she has shed light on many different and relevant issues such as poor labor conditions, the influence of autocratic external actors, environmental problems and many more. *Juratovic* also expressed his acknowledgement and respect for Gordić Perc's fearlessness in her search for truth.

*Thomas Hacker*, MP of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Vice President of the Southeast Eu-

rope Association, gave an emotional laudatory speech and thanked Gordić Perc for her personal dedication to investigative journalism. *Hacker* underlined that courageous journalists such as Gordić Perc and her colleagues are indispensable democratic correctives in society and the pillars of free press and freedom of expression in the region.

Following the award ceremony, *Gordić Perc* gave an insightful acceptance speech in which she revisited the personal experiences she made and the results of her investigation. She pointed out her concerns regarding the potential effects of her investigation on the Vietnamese workers and drew a critical light on Serbian authorities who failed their responsibility to prevent such incidents. She thanked the Southeast Europe Association and its present members for the attention for her work, underlining that this kind of support is crucial to support investigative journalism in the region.

The adjacent discussion "Working as a Journalist in Southeast Europe" was moderated by *Krsto Lazarević* who was himself awarded the 2022 Journalist Award of the Southeast Europe Association earlier this year for co-hosting the German-speaking podcast "Neues vom Ballaballa-Balkan". This interview was followed by a lively discussion with the audience, evolving not only around the specific report on the Linglong International Europe Ltd in the Serbian provincial town of Zrenjanin, but also including a broader picture of the current standing of journalists in the Balkans. Gordić Perc offered a matter-of-fact analysis on the situation of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the region, rejecting overly optimistic interpretations. The laureate also used the occasion to address the present German policymakers and members of the new German government to raise awareness of authoritarian developments in the region and to motivate them to increase their commitment to the EU-perspective of the Balkan countries and the responsibilities and implications it bears for European foreign policy.