

press-release

Leipzig Media Prize 2007 to Akbar Ganji, Vasil Ivanov and Wolfram Weimer

LEIPZIG, May 2. The 30,000 Euro “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” of the Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig for 2007 is jointly awarded to Iranian journalist Akbar Ganji, Bulgarian TV reporter Vasil Ivanov and chief editor of the German magazine “Cicero”, Dr. Wolfram Weimer.

For the first time the prize will be handed out October 8, on the eve of the anniversary of the Leipzig demonstration of October 9, 1989 which was of decisive importance for the peaceful revolution in the former GDR. Peter Krakow, CEO of the foundation explains: *“This new date confirmed by the Foundation Council stresses the fact that the Media Prize is awarded in the tradition of the peaceful revolution with one of its main objectives to achieve the freedom of opinion and the press.”*

So far, the Leipzig Media Prize has been awarded six times, each time around the “International Day of the Freedom of the Press” of the UNESCO on May 3. This date will still be important for the foundation and its prize. From now prize winners will be announced on May 2.

A column standing in the courtyard of Leipzig’s St. Nikolai church is the symbol of the 1989 political changes. Each laureate will be presented with a small bronze copy of this column. It was at St. Nikolai’s where the peaceful revolution took its start at that time.

The “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” is given to journalists, publishers and media institutions who protect and foster freedom of speech and the press by personal commitment, persistency and willingness to even take risks.

Akbar Ganji has proven his commitment and courage for many years and suffered a lot. After he had participated in an Iran conference of Berlin’s Heinrich-Böll-Foundation in April 2000 Ganji was arrested in Tehran. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and five years expatriation for “propaganda against theocracy, danger to the safety of the state and insult of the state leadership” because he had blamed the Iranian regime for the assassination of political opponents and intellectual dissidents in numerous articles. Later on, this sentence was reduced to six years. However, Ganji was not silent. In a widely noticed piece of writing he composed in prison Ganji denounced the structures of the Islamic state and the violation of human rights. As a consequence his conditions in prison were tightened. He was tortured several times and went on hunger strike in protest. He resisted to take an oath of loyalty to the Führer. Ganji was discharged from prison March 18, 2006.

Kontakt:

Medienstiftung der Sparkasse Leipzig, Menckestraße 27, 04155 Leipzig
Tel.: 0 341 / 562 96 61 E-Mail: info@leipziger-medienstiftung.de
Weitere Informationen zu den bisherigen Preisträgern unter:
www.leipziger-medienstiftung.de

Vasil Ivanov whose apartment in the Bulgarian capital Sofia was devastated by a bomb in April 2006 is one of only few investigative journalists in Bulgaria. He works with the private TV station "Nova". Within the last two years he revealed several acts of corruption within Bulgarian elite and compiled related facts for his TV station. He exposed a notary who legalised motor cars stolen in Western Europe, reported on corrupted physicians in public hospitals and on police officers who cooperated with pimps. With a candid camera Ivanov took pictures of serious deficiencies and mistreatments of prisoners committed by the wardens in Sofia's prison who organized "gladiator fights" there.

The bomb attack heavily devastated his apartment and wounded his grandmother. The Bulgarian National Assembly condemned the attack and the journalist was given personal protection. Ivanov who claims to know who the assassins are continues his investigations despite numerous threats.

Wolfram Weimer, chief editor of the news magazine "Cicero", filed a lawsuit at the Federal Constitutional Court in order to obtain a judgment against the weakening of the freedom of the press by means of judicial sophistry. According to a Cicero report which quoted an internal paper of the Federal Criminal Police Office on a terrorist the prosecution authorities ransacked the rooms of the magazine as well as the apartment of an employee in 2005. They explained the search with the reproach of a breach of secrecy and were supported by Otto Schily, then Minister of the Interior. Weimer's appeal against this search was refused by two judicial authorities. It was the Federal Constitutional Court which finally proved him right in February this year. Judges decided that the mere publishing of an official secret in the press does not justify a search of the editorial office. A search will be only legitimate if there are real clues that a journalist had committed aiding and abetting of a breach of secrecy and that a person obliged to secrecy aimed at publishing it. *"Searches and confiscations in preliminary proceedings against members of the press will be illegal under constitutional law if they exclusively or predominantly serve the purpose to reveal an informant."* Stephan Seeger, Managing Director of the Foundation says: "That's a decision which means more legal security for investigative journalists. It also strengthens the freedom of the press at a time when it is more and more restricted because of perceived or real concerns of security."

"Prize winners 2007 are examples of the whole range of threats and obstructions directed against investigative journalists and the freedom of the press. Threats range from brutal state despotism and criminal reprisals up to judicial sophistry", declares the Board Member of the Foundation and former chief editor of the Leipzig based newspaper, LVZ Hartwig Hochstein. Prize winners were selected by the Foundation Council composed of chief editors, TV correspondents and writers. Proposals came from national and international experts. Under the direction of Professor Michael Haller students in journalism of Leipzig's University carried out investigations on the qualification of the proposed candidates.

More information to former prize winners and to the work of the foundation you will find here: www.leipziger-medienstiftung.de

Leipzig, May 2, 2007

Kontakt:

Medienstiftung der Sparkasse Leipzig, Menckestraße 27, 04155 Leipzig
Tel.: 0 341 / 562 96 61 E-Mail: info@leipziger-medienstiftung.de
Weitere Informationen zu den bisherigen Preisträgern unter:
www.leipziger-medienstiftung.de