

press release

Leipzig Media Award 2009 to Roberto Saviano, Dušan Miljuš and Ahmet Altan

Leipzig, September 4th, 2009. This year's "Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media", donated by the Media Foundation of the Sparkasse Leipzig and including a total prize money of 30,000 €, goes - ex aequo - to Roberto Saviano, Dušan Miljuš and Ahmet Altan.

Roberto Saviano, who was born in a small town near Naples, the stronghold of the Camorra, has focussed – for years on end – both his work as a journalist and as a writer on this criminal organisation. In 2006, he published the fiction book "Gomorrha", which has also been adapted for screen. In it, he in detail portrays Mafia's underhand methods, its economic and political entanglement, and, moreover, speaks out about culprits and rackets. One certain Camorra clan put a death sentence on him and threatened to kill him several times. Thanks to writer Umberto Eco and the Nobel Committee who interfered on his behalf, Saviano is now under constant police protection, but has to change hideouts every other day.

Constant police protection – this is a feature of **Dušan Miljuš'** life as well. In 2008, the editor-in-chief of the Croatian daily "Jutarnji" was beaten up by strangers with baseball bats outside his house. The assailers broke his arm, he also suffered from concussion. Even before this attack, he got hate mail; a competing newspaper even published his obituary. What caused threats and the attack can only be assumed: newspaper articles about arms smuggling between the European Union and the states of former Yugoslavia and about the dealings of the Mafia in the municipal building trade in Croatian cities. Dušan Miljuš too, he named the culprits. In Croatia, he has become a symbol of brave journalism. "Jutarnji list" has been publishing a photo of its editor-in-chief ever since, demanding that the crime must be cleared up completely.

Laureates

2001
Prof. David Protess, USA
Renate Flottau, Germany
Thomas Mayer, Germany

2002
Grigorij Pasko, Russia
Jolana Voldánová, Czech Republic
Simone Wendler, Germany

2003
Daoud Kuttab, Palastine
Gideon Levy, Israel
Wladimir Mostowoj, Ukraine
Netzwerk Recherche e.V., Germany

2004
James Nachtwey, USA
„La Voz de Galicia“, Spain
„Journalisten helfen Journalisten e.V.“, Germany

2005
Seymour M. Hersh, USA
Anna Politkovskaja, Russia
Hans-Martin Tillack, Germany
Britta Petersen, Afghanistan

2006
Alina Anghel, Moldova
Dr. Volker Lilienthal, Germany
Fabrizio Gatti, Italy

2007
Vasil Ivanov, Bulgaria
Akbar Ganji, Iran
Dr. Wolfram Weimer, Germany

2008
Susanne Fischer, Germany
Alan Johnston, Great Britain
Win Tin, Burma

“You have to be crazy if you want to do something like this”, says **Ahmet Altan** about his work. He is editor-in-chief of “Taraf” (“Point of View”), a Turkish newspaper founded in 2007 that caused quite a few sensations in Turkey with its revelations. Altan started his career as a journalist and columnist for renowned newspapers such as “Hürriyet” or “Milliyet”, but repeatedly came into conflict with the Turkish state. He was sacked by “Milliyet” due to some journalistic work in which he fictionally laid out a picture of Kurday, a state populated by a majority of Kurds. He was banned and wrote novels. It was only with “Taraf” that he was able to return to his work as a journalist. In September 2008, he wrote an article about the genocide of Armenians and got prosecuted for dividing the Turkish nation. Regardless, “Taraf” continued making enemies within the Turkish government and the military, with an article, for instance, that focussed on a PKK attack which resulted in the deaths of 17 soldiers of the Turkish army. “Taraf” claimed, the Turkish army knew about this attack beforehand but did not introduce any measures against it. “Taraf” doesn’t get any advertisements, is sued regularly by the authorities and, therefore, suffers from serious economic problems. Foreign correspondents in Turkey consider “Taraf” as being idealistic and uncompromising. Despite the problems and threats it faces, “Taraf” with its editor-in-chief will soldier on.

The prize will be awarded for the ninth time. As in 2008, the award ceremony will take place on October 8th, the eve of the anniversary of the peaceful revolution in the former GDR, which is connected to the decisive mass demonstration in Leipzig on October 9th, 1989. With this reminiscence to the changes of 1989, the Media Foundation wishes to highlight the moral connection between the prize and the peaceful revolution, because the wish to be granted the freedom of media and the press had been one of the main objectives of the 1989 demonstrators.

Moreover, this connection is symbolized by a miniature replica of the commemorative column on Leipzig’s Nikolaikirchhof, the Prize winners will be awarded with. The peaceful revolution of 1989 started with prayers for peace at St. Nicholas church in the city centre of Leipzig. The “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” goes to journalists, publishers and media institutions who – by way of their daring, courage and commitment – strengthen the freedom of the media and the press.

From a list of proposals handed in by national and international experts of all media, laureates have been selected by the Foundation Council of the Media Foundation of the Sparkasse Leipzig composed of chief editors, TV reporters and writers.

Proposals for the 2010 “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” should be forwarded until February 28th, 2010.