

Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence

An initiative of the Robert Bosch Stiftung and ERSTE Stiftung, in cooperation with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.

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2010 Balkan Fellowship Topic: Taboo

We invite candidates for the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence in 2010 to identify, explore and demystify taboo issues about which there is little serious discussion in the media in South East Europe, and to strip away the clichés surrounding them.

Taboos change – rapidly. Homosexuality was once a taboo in Western Europe, as was “living in sin”, [i.e. outside marriage], abortion, childlessness, physical disabilities, atheism and suicide.

No longer. But new taboos have arisen. The Europe of our ancestors was in some ways more accepting of depression, virginity, celibacy, getting old, illness and death than we are in our more youth-centred and health-orientated society.

Other once popular habits are becoming social sins and taboos, like smoking or cruelty to animals. To have a boring, uninteresting job is increasingly a taboo – an offence against the US-driven cult of fulfillment. So is obesity – once a sign of prosperity.

Candidates might consider not only obvious taboo areas like gay marriage but family issues like arranged marriages and marital violence. Churches and other religious communities are increasingly shielded from real scrutiny. Do they merit this exemption from probing? The legacy of the wars of the 1990s is another field that might repay deeper exploration.

Candidates should not feel limited by these suggestions, but should feel free to propose other topics related to ideas surrounded by prejudice, silence and shame.

Proposals should include plans for cross-border research, involving at least two countries in the Balkans and one EU member state. They should unearth fresh information or adopt original perspectives that will attract a wide readership in the Balkans and the EU. Completed articles should be 2,000 words in length.