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Robert Bosch **Stiftung**

SHOCK THERAPY

by Milica Milovanovic, Radio Belgrade, participant on "Economic and Political reporting from South East Europe"

Have you ever wanted to go to one of those holiday-like trainings, where you get an hour of work for every five on a beach or at a pub?

If you are thinking of applying for this one, prepare to be seriously disappointed.

When our group first gathered, it seemed like a regular seminar/training stuff was about to happen - we were going to introduce ourselves, then someone would lecture to us for a few hours, explaining this and that, then a break and a short afternoon session that would give us enough time to get to know London.

Well, no chance, no chance at all!

What do you do with 12 journalists from South East Europe with different levels of experience and background knowledge?

You throw them right into the action, writing news, updates and stories – and then make them do it all again while explaining basic financial terms (and soon pretty advanced terms), theories and practical tricks of good reporting on economic and business events.

Because that is what Keith Stafford and his assistant Richard Meares offer in this training - pure knowledge stuffed with decades - long experience on the Reuters team. Most importantly, they are willing to share it all.

The first part of the training takes place in London's Canary Wharf, in Thomson Reuters Building, surrounded by towers of all-important banks and other financial royalty. Canary Wharf is the one of the business centers of the world and we were at the center of all action!

If you had not heard of the company names before the economic crisis you know them now: Royal Bank of Scotland, Citybank, AIG, and the "tower where Lehman Brothers used to be" as Richard gently puts it.

We covered all the important questions - when and how the crisis started, the consequences, what can governments do and how companies are trying to cope. We addressed how to tell if a company is profitable and what to expect from politicians in terms of public spending, how to watch a stock market and what in the world are central bank's responsibilities.

Keith is fair, but firm in the classroom but we did escape from time to time - to visit the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and talked to director himself - a visit on record, which resulted in nice stories about EBRD's plans and projects in our countries.

After London came a trip to Brussels with the Robert Bosch Stiftung's Lisa Heeman and Paul-Georg Friedrich to mark the four day long political part of training, with speakers lined up to talk to us about EU institutions, lobbying, non government organizations and ENLARGEMENT - the really big topic for all of our countries except Romania and Bulgaria. Olli Rehn, the Commissioner in charge of all of our countries' European future spoke on the record too.

First part of training ended with visit to Oxford, where we had dinner Harry Potter style, in Wadham College along with another group of Thompson Reuters program participants and learned on our way back that the all-King of Pop, Michael Jackson,



was dead. (The O2 arena, visible from our flats in Canary Wharf, was to be the first to host his comeback tour concerts.)

Summer disappeared very fast for me, probably due to the fact I haven't had a proper vacation...or many days off work. The German part of training was approaching but my homework was done (three stories on topics relevant to the course) and my country presentation was nearly finished.

The German part of training our daily routine was slightly different; in London the day would start by checking the price of dollar and yield on US treasury bonds and then talking about important business news. In Frankfurt, it was dollar-bonds-news again, but followed by presentation on Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia-our countries. Although I clearly remember Keith telling us Powerpoint was not necessary we all discovered we could give it a go – and it seemed everyone wanted a bullet point to say their country claimed clean water as a key resource.

Frankfurt felt great for us all. We already knew our strengths and weaknesses, and were eager to pick up from where we left in London. Among new terms and tricks on company and stocks watching, profit/loss accounts and initial public offerings (IPOs) were lessons of pure journalism gold - how to write features and opinion pieces.

Then came Berlin. God knows, our countries have hefty histories and carry a lot of luggage from the past, but Berlin is something else.

Intertwined on those streets are history and future, modern and ancient, new and hip and old and graceful, with its wounds never to be healed and bravery to be better from generations past showed on every corner.

In terms of work, we had a break in Berlin, with speakers wanting to stay off record, but in terms of background, both on training and off, it was an experience of a lifetime. Then it was back to Frankfurt and a simulation of an important economic event. Adrian Mosoianu from Romania said; "This training was exactly what I needed, because since I first entered the media, all I learned, I learned on the job, in real time and under real pressure. I'm sure it's the same with younger journalists in Romania and that's why it would be great for this project to continue in the years to come. On the human side, I can say I found true friends in the other Balkan countries and not just fellow-colleagues".

"It was great!" Nickolay Stoyanov from Bulgaria agreed, "I think the biggest asset I got from this training was the contacts. Well, I call them contacts, but actually it is friends. Now I know that whatever happens in a country nearby I can learn more by a simple phone call.

"The trainers, Keith and Richard, were great. They really helped me improve my writing and taught me how to get rid of tons of useless words."

What will I remember from this training? Accuracy, knowledge, precision, passion. Our work is such, without one the others are useless.

Thank you Keith and Richard, Thompson Reuters Foundation and Robert Bosch Stiftung, London, Brussels, Frankfurt and Berlin. Thank you, my friends Adrian, Mihail, Nickolay, Iskra, Katarina, Alisa, Aleksandra, Bernard, Jeton, Elira, Mirjana and Kole.