



European Citizenship Awards

Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe

"Okruženje" programme

Description of the nominee:

Okruženje' ('Vicinity' in English) is CDRSEE's TV current affairs talk show that brings together guests from Balkan countries previously in conflict and from diverse backgrounds to express their ideas, listen to others and discover their common ground. It is the first initiative of its kind after the split of Yugoslavia. As it embarks on its fifth season, the focus remains the same- on the viewers- as this is an opportunity for people to explore issues that had been unresolved for years, through dialogue. The objective of the programme is to provide a venue for open discussion about often controversial topics that affect the region, emphasising the shared experiences as well as tackling the differences, while promoting reconciliation and cooperation. The target public includes Southeast European citizens (18-65) with a special focus on youth. The European Fund for the Balkans and the German Federal Foreign Office have been our funding sponsors with a budget of 275.000€ per season.

Impact achieved:

The impact of our initiative is measured by its viewership and the interest it creates, not only in terms of numbers, but also in the diversity of the audiences; an essential indicator of impact in a still deeply divided region. Over the years, 'Okruženje' has increased its visibility and become a brand, aired on 10 national channels in the countries of former Yugoslavia, Albania and on the Albanian-language channel in Kosovo. As our talk show evolved, the stature of our guests grew. In August 2015, 'Okruženje' made history. For the first time ever, Prime Ministers Edi Rama of Albania and Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia came together in the same studio to discuss a joint youth project and regional cooperation. In Serbia, about two million viewers tuned in, while in Albania the broadcaster drew 85% of viewers - the channel's highest viewership share ever. Thanks to our increased visibility, our message of reconciliation and democracy through open discussion is reaching more and more people.

What makes the initiative innovative?

Never before has there been a television show which could host citizens from different countries of the Southeast Europe and address issues that are sensitive for the nations of the region. This risky step has led to real opportunities for understanding and acceptance. In spite of the difficulties of the issues, talking about topics such as 'War Crimes', 'Organised Crime and Corruption', 'The Rise of Nationalism', has provoked people to listen to other points of view, and respect other perspectives. The manner in which the programme is made is also innovative. Rather than just talking about reconciliation, the team behind the show (the CDRSEE) is multi-national and embodies the values of democratic reconciliation in the manner in which it works. Taking a step further, 'Okruženje' brought together the Prime Ministers of Albania and Serbia in the same studio. This move was the reason for people to get engaged in a dialogue on social media about cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, the CDRSEE adapted its international current affairs talk show to the European Union and created 'Vicinity Europe'. Issues considered taboo were discussed while people experienced and benefited from home. Two pilot shows were produced- the first one addressed the refugee and migrant crisis and the second one looked at the concept of Europe as a whole. Co-hosts Tim Judah of The Economist and Susan Nadeau, 'Vicinity Europe' editor and former Reuters correspondent, presented the shows.

Contribution to European values:

'Okruženje' has contributed to the European values of democracy, freedom of speech, reconciliation, pluralism, tolerance and equality. It has created an open forum based on mutual respect for people of different countries, with different religious, social and economic backgrounds to engage in fruitful dialogue. In this way it contributes to the European principles of good citizenship and shared responsibility in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and build new foundations for the future.

Website or promotional materials:

<http://cdrsee.org/home>,

<https://www.facebook.com/Center-for-Democracy-and-Reconciliation-in-Southeast-Europe-CDRSEE-285821751452333/>

<https://twitter.com/cdrsee>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Okruzenje>

<http://okruzenje.net/>