

General Assembly of the Asian-Pacific-Broadcasting Union (ABU) in Iran

In November 2007, Iran was the host of the General Assembly of the Asian-Pacific-Broadcasting Union (ABU). 170 representatives, general directors and directors of state-run and public broadcasters from the entire Asian region along with high-ranking representatives of associated members such as the BBC, Radio Netherlands Worldwide (NRW) or Deutsche Welle, came to Tehran.



f.l.t.r.: H.E. Dr. Herbert Honsowitz, German Ambassador to Iran and Erik Bettermann, Director-General of Deutsche Welle

The state broadcaster IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) hosted the media conference, which the Iranians regard as highly prestigious. On the sidelines of the General Assembly its representatives sought contacts to foreign guests. Among them were the President of the European Broadcasting Union, **Fritz Pleitgen**, and the Director-General of DW, **Erik Bettermann**.

Bettermann stressed in no uncertain terms the relevance of balanced reporting and of information based on tolerance with the aim of preventing an escalation of conflicts. The Director-General of DW and the President of IRIB, Sayyed Ezatollah Zarghami, agreed to continue the dialogue between both broadcasters knowing that there are differences in the self-understanding concerning the role of the media and the transmission of information.

IRIB wants to resume the currently idle cooperation particularly in the field of

journalist training, technical education and co-productions.

A 1,500 student strong journalistic faculty is part of the state broadcaster IRIB, which considers itself one of the largest broadcasters in the world and claims to employ 10,000 people. All of its students will eventually be employed by IRIB. The faculty is located within the spacious IRIB grounds, right in the center of Tehran. The area includes sports- and recreational facilities and can be considered a city within the city.

The university building is modern and representative. The technical equipment of the university - just like that of other IRIB buildings - is good. The head of the IRIB Training Center, M.R. Masoumzadegan and his professors guided the German guests through the auditoriums and classrooms with pride. The rooms are equipped with modern computers. The professor in charge explained: "This is where the students do their research and also read the Deutsche Welle news in Persian/Farsi".

IRIB has suffered from a decline in the numbers of foreign teachers in recent years. This has also resulted in a lack of professional exchange about journalistic standards. Therefore, IRIB teachers were very happy indeed to receive a gift of 50 copies of the DW journalistic handbook which DW translated into Farsi in Bonn, and which Bettermann presented to IRIB.

More important than the literature, however, is the desire for direct contacts – for a resumption of training programs. This could include workshops about

media and politics as well as audience research, digital audio processing or 3-D video animation.

All of a sudden - in the middle of the professional discussions about the training of journalists and technicians – well known tunes could be heard in the hallways: Viennese classical music at the Iranian state broadcaster. IRIB is training its own new generation in classical music. Besides an orchestra with classical Persian instruments, the broadcaster now has its own symphony orchestra and the musicians expressed their desire for music workshops with members of other orchestras and for opportunities to perform in Germany. The IRIB Training Center provides tremendous resources to cover the technical needs of the education, but it lacks international cooperation and critical exchange.

In the evening - at an ABU award ceremony - the guests experienced IRIB journalists, IRIB musicians, movie-directors and choreographers in action, who attempted to present a performance



f.l.t.r.: Sayyed Ezatollah Zarghami, the President of IRIB and Erik Bettermann, Director-General of Deutsche Welle

meeting contemporary standards to their international guests. Not everything worked without friction. While the technicians and the host did everything to insure a smooth continuation of the performance, young journalists of IRIB whispered, giggled and sent SMS messages back and forward – a likeable and normal group of young people. ●