



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2008

Working Session 2 : Fundamental freedoms I (30th September 2008)

EU statement

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

The European union attaches high importance to the freedom of the media as one of the fundamental freedoms that contribute to democratisation, human rights and the rule of law in all OSCE participating states. Freedom of expression, free media and information have been part of our key commitments since the 1975 Helsinki Summit and an important aspect in the activities of the OSCE field missions.

The office of the OSCE representative on freedom of the media enjoys widespread recognition throughout the OSCE area and has, since its creation, been one of the main institutional pillars of our organization in the human dimension. The value it provides to the OSCE as well as the challenges it continues to face were impressively highlighted during the seminar organized on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of its foundation earlier this year.

We commend Mr.Haraszti for his excellent leadership over the past year. Together with his dedicated staff and in line with his predecessor, he has managed to exercise his office in an objective, balanced and highly professional manner in all regions of the OSCE area, including in member states of the EU. The representative has continued to play a highly valuable role as an early warning instrument for media issues in all OSCE participating states.

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We look forward to further close cooperation with Mr Haraszti and his team on all aspects of media freedom, including new challenges arising from developments in broadcasting technology and the growing use of internet media. We encourage the representative to continue his support to participating states by providing legal reviews of draft media legislation. Regional media conferences organized by the representative's office have proven to be a useful instrument for raising awareness for media freedom in various OSCE participating states.

Referring to the need for coherence and to avoid duplication in the work of international organisations, the EU welcomes the existing cooperation between the OSCE and the council of Europe. The EU encourages both organisations to enhance and strengthen their cooperation in all fields possible, especially regarding freedom of expression, free media and information.

Since our last HDIM one year ago, some progress has been achieved in the implementation of commitments regarding freedom of the media in the OSCE area. However, serious shortcomings persist.

Killings of journalists, violence, intimidation, imprisonment and harassment against journalists continue to occur in a number of OSCE participating states. Legislation leading to a criminalization of journalists' activities, administrative measures such as restrictive licensing practices, economic pressure on journalists as well as undue state influence on public media can also still be observed. Independent internet providers face restrictions and complain about harassment by technical means in some participating states.

Generally, there is a worrying tendency in several participating states to label the international community's concern for media freedom and the protection of critical journalists as 'intrusion into internal affairs'. Against the background of our common OSCE commitments, this is not acceptable.

In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, far-reaching limitations affecting nearly all aspects of media freedom continue to be of high concern to the EU.

The EU deplores the continued difficult situation of independent media in Belarus. It calls on the belarusian authorities to continue using the representative's assistance to bring the media environment in line with OSCE commitments. The EU will closely follow the impact which the new media law might have on the situation of independent media.

In Moldova, legislative reforms have been achieved concerning media freedom. However, real progress in implementation, especially in light of the forthcoming elections, is needed to achieve genuine media freedom. The EU is following the developments closely.

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Regarding Azerbaijan, we are concerned about the continued harassment of independent journalists and strongly urge the authorities to improve their cooperation with the representative.

In Kyrgyzstan, recent legislation seriously limits electronic media by imposing quotas for local productions, and we appeal to the kyrgyz authorities to revise this legislation in line with the representative's assessment.

The EU calls on Kazakhstan to bring its media law fully into accordance with its OSCE commitments as affirmed at the last ministerial council and, for this purpose, to take the representative's recommendations into account.

Regarding Armenia, we support the call of the Representative to review the recently adopted amendments to the TV and radio law. This would allow the government to follow without delay the 17 June decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of the TV station A1+ which has been unlawfully deprived of its licence in 2002.

In Russia, we call on russian authorities to take effective measures to strengthened security of journalists, to thoroughly investigate all reported cases of violence or killings, and bring those responsible to justice. Also, the EU considers that the lack of equal media access for the opposition candidates in the parliamentary elections in december and in the presidential elections in march was one of the main obstacles to a truly competitive electoral process.

As for Turkey, we regard the recent revision of article 301 of the turkish penal code as a step in the right direction. At the same time, we would like to reiterate our call for a complete abolition of this provision, as it continues to impose serious restriction to media freedom in this country.

Mr/Ms Moderator,

The EU stands ready for further close cooperation and dialogue with other OSCE participating states on all aspects of media freedom and would like to ensure the representative of the freedom of the media of our continued support for his activities.

EU recommendations are circulated separately.

The candidate country Croatia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania and Montenegro,

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the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Norway, align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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