



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media**

14th Central Asia Media Conference

From traditional to online media: best practices and perspectives

**Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
5-6 July 2012**

DECLARATION

The 14th Central Asia Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media with the assistance from OSCE field operations in Central Asia, was held on 5-6 July in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

Throughout the years the Central Asia Media Conference has become a unique forum to discuss media issues and co-operation among journalists in Central Asia. We gather for the first time in Ashgabat.

The two-day conference hosted more than 150 journalists, media experts, government officials, parliamentarians, civil society representatives and academia from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. We welcomed our colleagues, observers from Afghanistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The focus of the conference was social and online media. Conference participants explored issues related to international standards and national practices regarding freedom of the media in social media and online broadcast regulation. Participants also discussed the latest media developments in Central Asian states. Furthermore, legal challenges and policies and practices pertaining to online and social media, economic models, and prospects for online media outlets were discussed during the conference.

The Conference:

1. Acknowledges the importance of rotating its venue for maintaining the spirit of co-operation and trust and thanks the authorities of Turkmenistan for being a good host.
2. Welcomes the fact that representatives of the media, civil society, as well as government representatives from all countries of Central Asia were able to take part in the conference and discuss important issues in the field of online and social media on the regional level.
3. Acknowledges that online and traditional media provide opportunities to strengthen implementation of existing commitments of the OSCE participating States in the sphere of media freedom.
4. Welcomes the fact that online media allow for more diversity and pluralism.

5. Emphasizes the actual benefits that Internet offers, including advancements in education, economy, individual communications, and acknowledges its importance as a tool to seek, produce, receive, and distribute information.
6. Calls on governments to ensure protection of the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information by adopting appropriate laws, policies and practices and by ensuring independent judicial oversight and effective public scrutiny of their implementation.
7. Stresses that restrictions to the right to free expression on the Internet are only acceptable if in compliance with international law, necessary in a democratic society, prescribed by law and are in the public interest. Access to online media can be restricted only by court decision. Decisions to block web sites should be transparent and well-grounded. The list of restricted online media resources should be made public and accessible.
8. Believes that national laws should facilitate openness and transparency of the Internet, including online media.
9. Urges governments to consider access to and use of the Internet and its services, including social media and social networks, a human right and promote the universal access to it.
10. Urges to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnership of governments with all relevant parties to close the “digital divide” among different population groups, promote education on use of new media and foster general access to the Internet.
11. Urges telecommunication companies to safeguard network neutrality to ensure that online information and traffic are treated equally regardless of the device, content, author, origin or destination.
12. Acknowledges the active role that users assume in generating content, thus exercising their right to free expression.
13. Urges authorities to promote the use of social media tools to promote transparency and easy access of citizens to government-held information and information of public interest, as well as strengthen accountability of the officials.
14. Calls for close co-operation of the governments with civil society and telecommunication companies to ensure that Internet remains an open forum for public debate and that the rights of the users are protected.
15. Emphasizes that in order to fully exercise their rights, Internet users should be protected from unlawful breaches of privacy.
16. Calls on authorities to ensure that journalists, as well as bloggers and ‘citizen reporters’, can work unhindered.

* * *