



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

12th Central Asia Media Conference

Access to information and new technologies

**Dushanbe, Tajikistan
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Opening Statement by Dunja Mijatovic

Ladies, Gentlemen, and Colleagues,

I would like to welcome you all to the 12th Central Asian Media Conference. I am very glad to be with all of you today on this very special occasion.

First of all, I want to thank our host country, Tajikistan, for hosting the conference for the 3rd time.

I would also like to thank our generous donors: Lithuania, Sweden and the United States. Special thanks go to our colleagues and co-organisers -- the OSCE Office in Tajikistan and also to our partners -- the OSCE field operations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

I am very proud that media workers and government representatives from all five Central Asian States have joined us here today. This fact alone makes our event a unique forum for exchanging views on the latest media freedom developments in the Central Asian region.

In addition, I would like to extend a warm welcome to a colleague from Afghanistan.

The special topic of the conference this year is Access to Information and New Technologies, including developments related to the digital switchover and to the Internet.

I am sure we all agree that freedom of the media is a basic principle of democratic societies. In this regard, the digital revolution has many facets. The impact on society of "digitisation" technologies is a universal one, affecting everything. But how does this digitisation change our basic perception of society and media freedom?

The basic concepts such as value, culture, community, law, etc.: do these change under the impact of new information and communication technologies? If so, to what extent and what are these changes?

New media have certainly changed the communications and education landscape in an even more dramatic manner than the electronic mass media did. In a world of new media, availability and diversity allow us to access and consume whatever media we want, wherever, whenever, and however we want.

The importance of free access for every citizen here in Tajikistan or anywhere in the world cannot be raised often enough in the public arena and cannot be discussed often enough among stakeholders: civil society, the media, and local and international authorities. Freedom of speech is more than choice of which media products to consume. Media freedom and freedom of speech in the digital age also mean giving everyone - not just a small number of people who own the dominant modes of mass communication, but ordinary people, too - an opportunity to use these new technologies to participate, to interact, to build, to route around, and to talk about whatever they wish, be it politics, public issues, or popular culture.

Participation in culture is important because it allows people to influence one another and change one another's minds. But it also has a performance value: when people make new things out of old ones, when they produce, when they are creative, they exercise their freedom through their participation in culture.

Ease of access to and dissemination of information leads to continuous learning; social collectivity and cooperation; a remix culture; and closing of the gap between user and producer. Traditional mass media, especially in transition countries, are undergoing a transformation. We are all aware that the transition to digital broadcasting transmission entails much greater diversity of media services, including interactive data transmission, high definition television, more targeted special interest programming, pay-as-you-view programming and electronic commerce facilities. The shortage of frequencies is much less a factor in limiting services than it used to be. This factor has important policy ramifications: in the context of a generally more liberal, market-orientated approach to media and telecommunications, spectrum scarcity can no longer provide the primary rationale for close government regulation of the electronic media.

The characteristics of the new media mean that, unlike traditional broadcast media, there are higher expectations of individual freedom and autonomy. Development of the Internet plays a crucial role. More information is available and easily accessible, but new legislation and restrictive measures, including blocking and filtering, are unfortunately encountered in many OSCE countries, impeding the free flow of information on the Internet. The digital age offers a promise of a truly democratic culture of participation and interactivity. Realising that promise is the challenge of our times.

I have said many times and repeat once more here; it is a lost battle to try to restrict the free flow of information in this new age.

Our goal should be to maximise media freedom in a both structural (business) and a social (speech-related) sense. With new technologies and outlets radically reshaping the communications and mass media landscape, doubt has been cast on traditional regulatory assumptions and old rules have become counter-productive. In an age of rapid technological change and convergence, archaic government controls over the media are increasingly unjust, indefensible, and ultimately unsustainable. Despite progress, many challenges remain, including the lack or poor quality of national legislation relating to freedom of information, a low level of implementation in many OSCE member states and existing political resistance.

Global change is a challenge no society can ignore. How a society uses the new communications technologies and how it responds to economic, political and cultural globalisation will determine its future.