
COUNTRY PROFILE: Cose

Cose* is a democracy in the OSCE, situated between Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Freedom of expression is reasonably protected for traditional media outlets in the country's constitution. There is a mass media law covering both broadcast and print journalism, but making no reference to the internet (it was passed in 1963). The government is currently drafting an electronic media law.

- Population: 9,960,134
- GDP per capita: \$19,500
- Ethnic Groups: 90% Cosian; 7% Ruman; 3% Other
- Internet penetration: 80% of population are active online users with a wide range of blogs (recreational, political, etc) and news publications online.
- Unemployment rate: 10%
- Labor force: agriculture: 4.7%; industry: 30.9%; services: 64.4%

*Cose is loosely based on statistics of Hungary.

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- Delegates will divide into groups and will look at policy from all perspectives, including:
 - 1) Citizens/internet users
 - 2) Internet service providers
 - 3) Editors and web site/blog managers
 - 4) Intellectual property rights holders (e.g., authors, film producers, photographers)
 - 5) Government/lawmakers
 - Three cases have arisen over the past six months and have contributed to public pressure to enact an electronic media law. Decisions taken on these cases will help determine the new electronic media law and Cose's direction for freedom of expression both online and in traditional media.

Case 1



An important news website, one of the main news channels in the country, publishes a news article about possible corruption in road building public procurement. The article mentions a well-known businessman. It mentions him in a neutral fashion, just as someone who has been involved in the process. However, when the article is published on-line readers post comments in which they accuse the businessman of being corrupt. Several readers post such comments and it evolves into a discussion with strong accusations against the businessman. It is possible for anyone to post comments on the web-site of the news service, including anonymous comments. There is no system for monitoring or filtering comments.

The businessman sues the news website for defamation. There is no suggestion that the news website article was defamatory, but he feels that it is their responsibility that the defamatory comments have been made public and spread.

Comment on this case. Specifically consider if it is correct to sue the news website or if someone else should be sued instead and if there is anything that the news website could have done differently. Also consider if there are any risks for freedom of expression and freedom of internet if the businessman is successful with his lawsuit.

Case 2



A popular entertainment company, CoseView, posted a trailer for an upcoming movie to their website. The movie is a fictional love story based on the civil war that transitioned Cose from a dictatorship to a democracy in 1963. In the movie two characters from opposing sides of the conflict fall in love.

A user known as Troll (who can be identified as an individual that has been blocked from other online forums for improper conduct by site managers) comments on the trailer using an ethnic slur against one of the characters and says he would never fall in love with someone who is Ruman (the minority ethnic group in Cose). Two Ruman users leave subsequent comments that demand removal of the offending comment and threatening violence against Troll. CoseView flags the comment but says it will wait until there are more than 10 complaints before removing it.

Should CoseView's model be followed by other sites? Or, is there a better policy for managing online comments? Should there be a national rule on this issue, or should each site be allowed to decide its own policies? Should intelligence be used to track individuals who commit a certain number of online offenses?

Case 3

Anonymous comments on a political blog of the opposition party include name-calling, blaming, accusing, and insulting of incumbent politicians. Several politicians demand removal of the comments and threaten to sue the blog owner (who is also the editor-in-chief) for defamation if they are not removed within 24 hours of their demand, but the blog owner refuses to remove the comments in the name of freedom of speech. The politicians then contact Wordpress because the blog is hosted through them.

Should Wordpress get involved? What steps might be taken from here by the blog owner and the angry politicians?

Group Presentations



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- Each group will present recommendations for the electronic media law that would best promote the interests of society.
 - Each group will also each present the three most important lessons learned from the cases.
 - Presentations should last 20 minutes.

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- Each group will present recommendations for the electronic media law that would best promote the interests of society. It must address interactivity (comments, twitter, etc.).
 - What type of regulatory mechanism—independent regulator, self regulation, no regulation? Is a special arbitrator or ombudsman required?
 - Address which parties are liable and responsible. Is moderation required?
 - How would a media literacy campaign be used to further these goals?
 - Presentations should last a maximum of 15 minutes.
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