



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

9th Central Asia Media Conference

**Media self-regulation in Central Asia
Towards Independent and Responsible Media**

Dushanbe, 1-2 November 2007

DECLARATION

The Ninth Central Asia Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in co-operation with the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, was held this year in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Journalists, media professionals, and NGOs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as international and regional experts, gathered to discuss the current media situation in their countries. The topic of this year's conference was **media self-regulation**.

The conference stated that self-regulation in democratic countries is an important contribution to media development. By fostering respect for journalistic ethical standards, it promotes media quality while maintaining editorial freedom. Media self-regulation also effectively helps minimize state intervention, and can serve as an antidote to judicial action against the media, for example in defamation charges.

The conference calls on governments in Central Asia to abolish all laws which criminalize journalistic activities. Handling of journalism-related issues should be transferred from the criminal into the civil-law domain.

The conference welcomed the fact that the role of media self-regulation was recognized as essential for the improvement of media freedom in Central Asia.

Some participants noted that the specifics of development in some countries make it difficult to establish journalistic organizations and complicate the formation of fully functional self-regulation mechanisms.

The Conference adopted a **Declaration** on media self-regulation with the following recommendations:

The Dushanbe Declaration on media self-regulation

- Media self-regulation aims at promoting independent and responsible media.
- Editorial independence is a pre-requisite of ethical journalism and media quality.

- Media self-regulation is, in its essence, a civil-society endeavor developed by media professionals for the public.
- Public authorities could best support the development of media self-regulation by creating a legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression and pluralism in the media, while refraining from regulating media content.

On Codes of ethics

- Where a common code of conduct has not yet been established, journalist organizations should organize meetings or committees aimed to agree on a joint code.
- Codes of ethics should be developed by media professional themselves.
- Journalist organizations should promote mechanisms to raise awareness of the need for journalists to abide by ethical standards. Ethical issues should for instance be included in journalism education.
- The existing codes of ethics should be promoted and publicized by every news outlet that has signed them. For instance, news outlets should regularly print their code of ethics in their paper.
- Codes of ethics should be considered as working documents, subject to possible future changes and interpretation, and not as a set of rigid rules.

On self-regulatory mechanisms

- Governments should not obstruct efforts by media outlets to create self-regulatory mechanisms, for instance press councils or ombudspersons.
- Governments should not participate in the creation of self-regulatory mechanisms. Self-regulation principles and ethics codes should not be adopted via legislative instruments.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms should be independent from government interests.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms should be established via a fully consultative and inclusive process.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms should address only questions of journalistic ethics. They should not be entitled by law or decree to ban media outlets or exclude individuals from the profession.
- Awareness raising campaigns should be carried out in order to educate the public on the importance of ethical media and the public's right to complain.