

Delegation of Switzerland

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF SWITZERLAND AT THE
SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON
PROMOTION OF PLURALISM IN NEW MEDIA**

Vienna, 7 and 8 July 2011

Session I: Challenges and opportunities for new media to foster pluralism

Mr. Chairperson,

Switzerland is pleased to participate in this important discussion on the topic of pluralism and the new media. We should like to underscore how relevant and pressing we consider this topic to be. For one thing, recent events have reminded us of the importance of the role played by the new media in the context of democratization and demands for fundamental freedoms. For another, this topic has been emerging significantly in international and regional forums for several years now.

The appearance and development of new media present unprecedented opportunities and challenges. New technologies allow an ever increasing number of people to access the information and knowledge society. By facilitating the access and participation of all, the new media encourage civic exchange and the involvement of citizens, significantly strengthening democratic processes in this way. Conversely, the debate on neutrality and Internet governance, ethical issues concerning data protection, inherent vulnerabilities in the system and the digital divide underscore the fragile balance on which these technological and social advances are based.

The new media go far beyond the frame of reference of the press and the traditional media. They represent an essential link in terms of the balance of power within a democratic society, for example through the early warning signals that they provide or through the system of accountability on the part of public authorities that they help to strengthen. Nevertheless, it must be said that the role of the media on the whole – in other words both the new media and the old – has not changed in the slightest.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The promotion of diversity, respect for freedom of expression and the protection of the individual must be at the heart of our response.

Diversity is at the centre of democratic concerns. Switzerland believes that it is the responsibility of States to guarantee and encourage diversity. Simple measures like the promotion of a public service for all or transparent management of the market involved can thus easily defuse potentially harmful situations and guarantee the emergence of a collective will united in diversity.

In a democratic and pluralistic society, everyone must be able to participate effectively in public debate. This is why civil rights and freedoms are fundamental and why restrictions to them must be limited to the necessary minimum. Regardless of the technology or media used, it is the duty of States to protect freedom of expression, whether the opinion is expressed online or offline.

Lastly, if we are talking about new media, we must not forget the new actors who put them into place and help them to evolve. As long as women, men and young people are harassed, intimidated or even killed because of what they write or because they have shared their views, freedom of expression will remain an empty promise. Switzerland is committed to ensuring that combating violence against journalists remains a priority. In this regard, we should take into account the increasingly decisive contribution of independent citizen journalists to the diversity of the media. They should therefore be able to benefit from similar protection and not live in fear of reprisals because of their postings or blogs. Censorship or self-censorship is no more acceptable online than it is in other media.

That said, this last remark highlights another challenge that we hope to be able to begin to respond to in the next few days, namely that of defining together a common vision and conceptual framework of what the new media are. Allow me to tie in here with the work carried out under the Swiss chairmanship by the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on New Media. This new approach is unequivocal: it is a matter of adopting a new expanded notion of the media, which includes all the actors involved in the production and dissemination of information with a view to facilitating mass communication. It is also a matter of adequately protecting the new actors so that they can carry out their functions in the media ecosystem and contribute to its diversity.

The results of this work have been formulated in a recommendation, which should be approved by the Committee of Ministers in September. A whole series of other points regarding the media ecosystem and Internet governance have also been addressed as part of this work. We are convinced that these ideas will provide inspiration for our discussion today and tomorrow.

Many subjects have been included in the agenda of our meeting here, and the scope of ideas is extensive. Among the topics presented, the discussion tomorrow on the digital switchover is greatly anticipated. Even though this switchover is a forward-looking solution with wide-ranging benefits, it could still pose some problems, such as preventing any discrimination as regards access to all, or granting concessions within the market. Furthermore, the risk of widening the digital divide must also be neutralized so as not to further marginalize those who could be adversely affected. The digital transition must be done in such a way as to ensure that no one is sidelined. Moreover, this basic assertion should be respected with regard to the new media in general.

Because they present many opportunities, the participation of all should be guaranteed, promoted and encouraged. We should like to work together to ensure that these technologies become even more accessible and universal. The new technologies offer new opportunities for a new citizenship. Switzerland is pleased that the OSCE and its participating States are seizing this opportunity.

Thank you.