



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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15TH SOUTH CAUCASUS MEDIA CONFERENCE

Quality journalism for trustworthy and credible information

18-19 July 2018, Tbilisi, Georgia

Recommendations

This document summarizes the main considerations and recommendations debated by over 70 participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia at the 15th annual South Caucasus Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 18-19 July 2018 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The conference focused on the challenges to free media and freedom of expression in the region and on best practices improving professional journalism and quality of information.

The following ten considerations were discussed by the conference participants:

1. The free and independent media can play an essential role in strengthening democratic societies and countering “hate speech”,

misperceptions and prejudices through the creation and spread of trustworthy and credible information.

2. In countering “hate speech”, terrorism and extremism, racism and intolerance, cooperation between all international and regional organizations is needed.
3. Freedom of information, and particularly access to information, fosters openness and accountability in public policy, and enables civil society, including the media, to contribute to good governance, thus contributing to peace and security in the region.
4. Social network platforms, messaging apps, and news aggregators play an important role in news distribution, and can provide opportunities for legacy media to develop innovative and successful business models in the digital age.
5. The voluntary adoption of professional standards, media self-regulation and other appropriate mechanisms by journalists and other media actors is essential for increased professionalism, accuracy and adherence to ethical standards in the South Caucasus.
6. While respecting and protecting freedom of the media the Governments should address current socio-economic challenges of the media.
7. Independent public service media, with their non-profit status, statutory mandate and accountability to public interests, serve quality journalism and are a crucial pillar of the OSCE media environment.
8. Journalism in the South Caucasus is increasingly facing challenges related to the growing prevalence of disinformation and propaganda in legacy and social media.

9. Media literacy, including initiatives provided by the media, is crucial to ensure that our societies are better prepared to make informed decisions and develop the resilience to identify credible information.
10. Good practices when it comes to countering disinformation must: enable and encourage free media; ensure that any interference in free speech is prescribed by an accessible, precise, clear and foreseeable law; pursue the legitimate aims as set in international human rights agreements; and avoid any unnecessary or disproportionately negative impact on the free flow of information.

In this regard, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media provides the following eight recommendations discussed in the conference:

1. Access to information, ensured by public authorities, is a key to the quality of information. Governments should become more transparent so as to provide accurate and timely information, including reliable statistics, with a view to promoting a well informed and inclusive public dialogue within their countries and throughout the South Caucasus.
2. National security and counter-extremism measures should not lead to undue restrictions of freedom of expression and governments should reaffirm their commitments to media freedom and freedom of expression in the new security context. Freedom of the media should not be opposed to security.
3. More action should be taken by all stakeholders to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to foster free access to the Internet.

4. Independence of regulatory media authorities must be guaranteed and respected by all State and media actors so as to avoid undue political or economic interference.
5. Media professionals should put significant efforts into strengthening transnational self-regulation cooperation in the region to promote common values of tolerance and non-discrimination, as well as professional standards.
6. Media literacy should be a priority of educational curricula, and the media should make it their mission to promote media literacy, including critical coverage of disinformation and propaganda campaigns, as well as raising awareness on the value and understanding of media freedom and quality journalism. Fact-checking initiatives should be developed and encouraged.
7. Public service media should set an example of how to provide quality information in compliance with the best professional practices and ethical standards. The legal framework should ensure their independence and sustainable finances.
8. The Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media will provide relevant recommendations to promote a better understanding of the impact of disinformation on freedom of the media and quality journalism, and relevant, necessary and appropriate responses to this phenomenon in the South Caucasus.
