



10th Central Asia Media Conference

The future of public-service broadcasting and the digital switchover in Central Asia

Almaty, 16-17 October 2008

DECLARATION

The Tenth 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 Astana, and with the assistance of other field presences in the region, was held this year in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Media professionals and government officials dealing with media governance from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as international and regional experts, gathered to discuss the latest media developments in their countries.

The specific focus of this year's conference was **the future of public-service broadcasting (PSB) in Central Asia, and how the digital switchover can support media freedom and media pluralism.**

The conference welcomed the fact that four Central Asian participating States were represented at the conference, acknowledging the values of public-service broadcasting. The conference encouraged governments, legislatures, and journalists of the region to transform their state-owned broadcasting institutions into independent public services. The conference appealed to relevant international organizations to provide assistance in this endeavour.

The conference stated that public-service broadcasting is one of the basic tools of democracies. They are indispensable in ensuring the freedom and transparency of elections, in fighting against hate speech, and in protecting the minority cultures of a country by offering objective news reporting and by broadcasting high quality programs.

When establishing public-service broadcasters, Central Asian countries should make sure that they create a legally protected broadcasting infrastructure, with guaranteed editorial autonomy, and with a financing system that allows the public-service broadcasters to be independent from both political and commercial interests.

While greeting Central Asia's first legislative effort to create public-service broadcasting, Kyrgyzstan's law "On Television and Radio Broadcasting", many participants noted with concern the amendments tabled by the President concerning the governing board. These amendments would transform the future public-service broadcaster from a government-independent institution into a dependent one. The participants urge the Kyrgyz government to

abide by international standards of independence of public service broadcasting from government, and provide a positive example for the region.

The conference also called attention to the changes affecting broadcasting in the digital era. Governments should regard the convergence of all broadcasting platforms into digital as a new opportunity to strengthen media pluralism. Governments should support equal access for all who wish either to broadcast or to receive broadcast, and establish independent licensing bodies.

The participants discussed ways how the financing of public-service broadcasting should be automated, in order to ensure that it can serve its distinctive mission when a multitude of digital channels will be available to the public. In the digital era, the importance of an advertisement-free public-service broadcasting with high-quality and objective programming only increases.

The conference ended by highlighting potential future activities in the media field in Central Asia.

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