



19TH CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA CONFERENCE ***Open Journalism in Central Asia***

18-19 October 2017, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

RECOMMENDATIONS

This document summarizes recommendations of more than 100 journalists, representatives of government, civil society and academia from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan along with participants from Mongolia and international experts at the 19th annual Central Asian Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 18-19 October 2017 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The digital technologies and the Internet have contributed to impressive advance in media production and distribution, users' engagement with the media and establishment of citizens' journalism. The new environment however poses a number of challenges to media freedom, from concentration of the distribution platforms in few hands through spread of illegal content, such as hate speech, disinformation and propaganda. While pursuing a legitimate aim to ensure security within their borders and protect their countries from the threat of terrorism, the governments must ensure that the citizens have an unencumbered access to various sources of information and have various opportunities to disseminate it. Any restriction of the freedom of expression must be taken in accordance with the law and international commitments in the sphere of freedom of the media, be proportionate to the aim and narrowly defined.

Freedom of expression is a staple of the functioning democratic society and a prerequisite to countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism. It can play a critical role in promoting equality and combating intolerance.

The conference participants agreed upon the following:

1. The OSCE participating States have a positive obligation to promote media diversity and to ensure that members of all groups of society have access to a range of means of communication and can consequently express themselves and engage in a meaningful debate.
2. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media should continue to assist participating States in abiding by their commitments in the field of media freedom while pursuing the legitimate aim of protecting their citizens from the acts of terror.

3. Participating States should sustain and develop education and training programmes in media and digital literacy in the context of countering extremism.
4. Blocking and deletion of the content should be allowed only in exceptional cases, in conformity with international obligations and the OSCE commitments in the media sphere. They should be under judicial scrutiny, subject to an appeal procedure, fair and transparent.
5. Effective and independent self-regulatory instruments, such as media ombudsmen and media councils, acting on the basis of journalistic codes, should be introduced wherever necessary and strengthened wherever they exist to facilitate a flexible and non-intrusive framework vis-à-vis rights and responsibilities of media and journalists in the digital media environment.
The participants suggest to institutions of media self-regulation and journalists' associations their active participation in compiling recommendations concerning coverage of terrorism and extremism.
6. Violence and threats against journalists remain a serious problem. The participants appeal to the state institutions to pay attention to it and to allocate adequate resources to prevention of such attacks and to investigation and bringing perpetrators to justice once such attacks occur.
7. Arbitrary detentions of journalists and vague charges of extremism levelled against them as retaliation for critical reporting are totally unacceptable.
8. Criminal defamation constitutes a threat to the freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and civil defamation suits which are connected to exorbitantly high damages pose a threat to survival of media outlets; so do unduly harsh sanctions, such as detention, loss of civil rights and loss of the right to practice journalism.
9. The participants appeal to the OSCE participating States to release all media professionals, journalists and bloggers detained and interned for pursuing their professional responsibilities.
10. They call on the RFOM to provide an independent legal review with the view of their compatibility to the OSCE commitments to the pending changes in legislation related to regulation of freedom of the media and freedom of expression, caused by development of new technologies and increasing threats of terrorism.