



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

**4th South Caucasus Media Conference**

**Media self-regulation in the South Caucasus  
Towards Independent and Responsible Media**

**Tbilisi, 11-12 October 2007**

**The South Caucasus Declaration on Media Self-regulation**

The Fourth South Caucasus Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Georgia, was held this year in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Journalists, media professionals, and NGOs from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as international and local 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 is an important contribution to media democratization. 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 welcomed the fact that self-regulatory bodies have already been established in all three countries. The Azerbaijani Press Council was created in 2003, while the Georgian Media Council was established in 2005, and the Armenian Media Ethics Observatory was formed in 2007. At the same time, the conference also highlighted the main obstacles standing in the way of these bodies' effective functioning. Lack of independence, lack of public awareness about the right to complain, and lack of professionalism on the side of the journalists remain major problems.

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

**The South Caucasus Declaration on Media Self-regulation**

- Media self-regulation is, in its essence, an endeavour pursued by media professionals for the benefit of quality journalism and the society.

- Public authorities could best support the work of self-regulatory mechanisms by creating a legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression and pluralism in the media, while refraining from regulating media content.
- It is only in a free media environment that media self-regulation can develop.
- Editorial independence is a pre-requisite of ethical journalism.

### *On self-regulatory bodies*

#### **Independence of the bodies:**

- Governments should not obstruct efforts by media outlets to create self-regulatory bodies.
- Self-regulatory bodies and their members should be independent from government interests.
- The state should not necessarily be ruled out as a potential financial supporter of a self-regulatory body; however, it can only do so in a way that guarantees that there would be no governmental interference in the work of the body.

#### **Effective functioning of the bodies:**

- Self-regulatory bodies should be established via a fully consultative and inclusive process.
- Self-regulatory bodies should include as much as possible a tri-partite representation (journalists and editors, media owners, and members of the public).
- Members of a self-regulatory body should be selected following a democratic, transparent procedure, and the term of membership should be limited in duration.
- Self-regulation mechanisms aimed at upholding a code of ethics should only have the power to impose moral redress (such as a right of reply, the publication of a correction, or an apology). They should not be entitled by law or decree to ban media outlets or exclude individuals from the profession. Only in very exceptional circumstances should other sanctions be considered, and this decision should be made by the self-regulatory body.
- Good governance and transparency should be applied to the everyday functioning of a self-regulatory body. This means the regular publication of activities and decisions, as well as the full disclosure of the operational budget.
- All media outlets that are members of the body should regularly take part in publicising the work of the self-regulatory body.

- 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.

### *On Codes of ethics*

- Journalists' organizations should promote mechanisms to raise awareness of the need for journalists to abide by ethical standards.
- The existing national codes of ethics should be promoted and publicized by every member 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 Ombudspersons*

- The creation of ombudsperson positions within media outlets should be promoted, especially where the high amount of state-owned outlets or other circumstances block the possibility for the national self-regulation body to work without governmental interference. This does not contradict the existence of press councils; it could be also seen as an additional co-operative self-regulation mechanism. Independent media ombudspersons are encouraged to gather regularly and share their experiences and recommendations.

Tbilisi, 12 October 2007