



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

## **6<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference**

### **Journalism education – improvement of the quality of education and new technologies**

**Tbilisi, Georgia  
19-20 November 2009**

#### **DECLARATION**

The Sixth South Caucasus Media Conference was organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in co-operation with the OSCE Offices in Baku and Yerevan. Hosted by the government of Georgia, the event took place on 19-20 November in Tbilisi.

Throughout the years the South Caucasus Media Conference has become a unique forum to discuss media issues and cooperation among journalists of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The specific focus of this year's conference was journalism education. Participants examined the role of journalism in modern society, assessed existing educational opportunities, discussed best practices in journalism education, and exchanged experiences. The two-day event provided productive framework for new ideas on how to approach the challenges that face journalism education in the South Caucasus.

Media professionals and government officials from the three countries participated in the conference. In addition, representatives from university journalism faculties, members of national and international organizations, and national and international experts joined the conference to discuss the latest media developments in the South Caucasus.

*Here are some of the main findings of the Conference:*

#### ***On media freedom.***

*The Conference:*

1. Urges all three governments to foster pluralism and refrain from harassment and monopolization of media.
2. Urges the regulatory bodies in all three countries to carry out their activities in a non-political and transparent manner, and to grant licenses to media representing all shades of their political life in order to ensure pluralism.

3. Notes that media ownership should be transparent, and urges all three countries to create or enforce legislation in this regard, as pluralism of ownership is a pre-requisite for pluralism of content.
4. Demands the immediate release of journalists presently in custody, and an end to future imprisonment in Azerbaijan.
5. Commends the commitment of the Azerbaijani government to decriminalize defamation. If this becomes reality, the South Caucasus could become a progressive European region where journalists will not be imprisoned for their work.
6. Welcomes recent positive developments in Georgia that have encouraged media pluralism and independence, including the satellite access that was granted to the opposition channel Maestro TV; preparations to launch a parliamentary channel in February 2010; and the growing number of invitations to all political forces to talk shows on private channels.

### ***On journalism education.***

#### *The Conference:*

1. Acknowledges that the impact of quality journalism education is limited without parallel development of the independent media.
2. Acknowledges that journalism is a civil activity; therefore, governments should refrain from over-regulating it.
3. Emphasizes that pluralism of the media and freedom of the Internet are the key values and among the most important conditions for the existence of a democratic society. Therefore, it is vital to ensure pluralism in the educational systems as well.
4. States that an academic degree in journalism should not be a prerequisite for a journalistic career. Media outlets can employ journalists who do not have a degree in journalism and this right should be respected by the authorities. Journalists should not have to meet government licensing standards in order to pursue their journalistic work.
5. Recommends, nevertheless, both basic academic and on-the-job education and training for media workers. Continual training programs should be provided for all journalists and other media professionals, including editorial staff, to further their existing knowledge and gain new skills.
6. Encourages development of up-to-date teaching and studying materials that incorporate new standards and methods.
7. Recommends that academic journalism education attract more practicing journalists as faculty.
8. Notes the importance of ongoing professional development for the faculty of journalism departments.

9. Calls on academic and journalistic educational organizations to provide training for media professionals on entrepreneurial and technical skills, so journalists can establish and operate independent and self-sustainable media outlets.
10. Stresses the importance of international cooperation in journalism education. Calls for greater use of international experience and best practices in journalists' training and educational institutions. Greater exchange of teaching materials, faculty and experiences among South Caucasus states should be promoted.
11. Encourages improving research facilities in journalism education institutions.
12. Notes that in the near future all media will be hosted by the Internet. The concept of locality will dissolve into the global realm; therefore, media education should reflect the global character of journalism. Governments should refrain from regulating the Internet.
13. Calls on the governments to support development of an Internet sphere with affordable and high-quality Internet connection and to create favorable conditions for healthy competition among ISPs.
14. Recommends incorporating Internet and online tools, including Web 2.0 tools, such as social networking, file-sharing platforms and other user-generated resources into the curriculum. All journalism students should be trained to use modern interactive technologies.
15. Calls on the states to assist state and private educational institutions with financing for their IT equipment and Internet access.
16. Believes that professional ethics and media law should be incorporated into curricula to promote responsible media.
17. Encourages journalism schools to acknowledge the importance of investigative journalism in democratic society and as a tool for combating corruption. Investigative journalism should be afforded a high place in the curricula, with the incorporation of journalist safety courses for volatile environments.
18. Encourages governments to support journalism reform education with all of the above goals in mind, taking into consideration the fact that education provided for journalism students not only shapes their professional skills, but defines the media as a legitimate profession in general.