

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 1

Fundamental freedoms I, including:

- Address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,**
- Freedom of expression, free media and information.**

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Today the free pluralistic press with reference to the leading world standards has been developed in Azerbaijan. The state has created all necessary conditions for free development of mass media.

So, effective from August 6, 1998 the Main Administration on protection of State Secrets in press and other Mass Media under the Cabinet of Ministers was liquidated by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Repeal of censorship was in keeping with general outlook of development of Azerbaijan as a democratic society. Measures, deamed in the Decree promoted to development of independent Mass Media, completely assured citizens in freedom of thought, speech and information in accord with international law, denoted in UN declaration on Human Rights as well as the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

With the purpose of improvement of Mass Media material and technical basis in the end of 1998 newspaper editorial offices were exempted from value added taxes. It ought to be remarked amount of annual discounts for Mass Media much more exceeds the taxes amount which they paid.

By the way, following liquation of the Main Administration on Protection of State Secrets in Press and other Mass Media, in Azerbaijan as in many other countries there were numerous their honor and dignity. On the basis of these suits sanctions were applied against many press media for the amount of hundreds million manats. However, as a result of human attitude of the State to press these fines were not levied and press bodies freely continue printing and distribution.

Certainly, Mass Media organizations are considered main actors raising awareness of people. Azerbaijan takes one of the leading stands among CIS countries and Eastern Europe according to quantity of Mass Media. About 5000 Mass Media organizations

registered in Azerbaijan. 20 percent of newspapers and magazines keep an independent position, 60 percent from them are of different political, public grasp and belong to private natural persons and organizations. There are published more than 60 newspapers in the regions. 35 scientific and practical, 75 social and political, social and economic and other magazines are published in the Republic. State registration process of Mass Media organizations was extremely simplified. Nowadays only submission of documents to the Ministry of Justice is required for publications of newspaper, magazines, foundations and news agency. After the following 7 days it is possible to start printing publications. One might say that at present in Azerbaijan we have one of the most liberal and democratic laws regarding to Mass Media. But Azerbaijan went forward and in 2009 there was created Mass Media State Support Fund in order to strengthen civil society, especially media organizations. Since 2009 Fund has been granting in the amount of 18 mil euro.

The Law of Azerbaijan Republic, "About Mass media" was adopted in December of 1999 providing freedom of speech and thought, independence of press and journalists, prohibiting application of measures, which limit freedom of press. Any interference of administrative official in to legal activities of Mass Media, his application of censorship, breach of professional independence, illegal suspension or halt production and distribution of Mass Media, illegal circulation seizure as well as violation of other rights in voke civil, administrative, criminal and other liabilities in accord with the registration of Azerbaijan.

Today, hundreds of media outlets operate in the country quite freely and in safety conditions, journalists carry out their professional duties without any obstacles. Journalists aren't held accountable for professional activities in Azerbaijan, just like in the developed western countries. For this reason, we see unacceptable the attempts of some foreign circles to distort reality in Azerbaijan, unreasonably combining individual situations, to harm the country's democratic image, and we call on them to refrain from such an approach. Generally, within the process of investigation or decision to require exemption them by some international organization, it can be valued as pressure on law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan.