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WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN,
AT THE 2010 OSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE**

Warsaw, 7 October 2010

**Forward-looking discussions
Working session 1: Freedom of media**

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that freedom of speech is closely connected with establishing the truth, autonomy, safeguarding the flexibility of the political system, and human rights and their defence.

I believe that the basic elements of freedom of the press were already laid down in the 1920s to 1940s by leading Tajik writers Sadriiddin Aini, Abulqosim Lohuti, Sotym Ulughzoda and many others who can be said to have paved the way for a free and democratic press.

Radio and television today are among the most important means of electronic communication to which the population has free access while at the same time reaching millions of listeners and viewers. Apart from their propaganda activity, they also have an informational, educational, cognitive, organizational and entertainment function.

The mass media in Tajikistan deal with all social problems. This autonomy of expression is also established in Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, which guarantees to all persons freedoms of speech and the press and the right to use information media. State censorship and the persecution of critics is prohibited in Tajikistan. The information subject to State secrecy is established by law. The special regulations governing the right to access to information were included in the laws on the mass media themselves, in particular the Law on the Press and Other Mass Media and the Law on Television and Radio.

To strengthen practical implementation and increase the role of the media in the socio-political and socio-economic life of society, the President of Tajikistan issued Decree No. 622 of 7 February 2009 to support the work of the media by fostering constructive and fruitful collaboration with ministries and departments, enterprises and

organizations and local executive authorities responsible for socio-economic reform in the country.

The heads of ministries and departments, enterprises and organizations, and local State executive bodies have been instructed to take urgent specific measures to answer the critical comments and proposals expressed in the media and to inform not only the Executive Office of the President but also the media concerned of the results of their review in the time-frame prescribed by law.

As a result of this decree, the Head of State has been able to give journalists greater potential for utilizing television, radio, newspapers and magazines to provide the population with timely information about progress in carrying out socially important tasks so as to ensure that the reactions to criticism and analytical material are reflected in a timely manner in radio and television programmes and in the pages of newspapers and magazines.

A special law devoted to this subject, the Law on the Right to Access to Information, has been adopted in Tajikistan. The purpose of this law is to establish a legal basis to safeguard the right of every citizen to freely seek and obtain information and also to ensure open communication of the activities of the State authorities. We are currently studying the quality of television and radio programmes, and there are plans in future to devise programmes on the basis of the study and listener and viewer interests as a way of providing access to information.

There are currently 28 television channels in the Republic of Tajikistan, of which 9 are State-owned channels and 19 private. Television programmes are broadcast in Tajik, Russian, English, Uzbek and Arabic. There are also 16 radio stations, of which 7 are State-owned and 9 private. They broadcast in Tajik, Russian, English, Uzbek, Farsi, Dari, Hindi and Arabic.

The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan prohibits propaganda that incites social, racial, ethnic or religious hatred and hostility and the dissemination of information containing State secrets. Temporary or specific restrictions can also be ordered by the court.

On 4 March 2005 President Emomali Rahmon issued an instruction to the heads of ministries, departments and local State authorities to hold quarterly press conferences with representatives of the media. Thanks to this instruction, journalists can meet with the heads of State bodies and ask questions of interest to them. The Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan makes it illegal to refuse to provide citizens with information (Article 148) and to prevent a journalist from carrying out his or her professional activity (Article 162).

In the words of the esteemed President Rahmon, “the media should above all publish material that fosters the growth of national self-awareness, the cultivation of patriotism, and propaganda of historical and cultural value with account taken of the most important demands of the time and the most prominent cultural achievements of mankind.” In a message to Parliament he said: “A healthy information climate must safeguard the exercise by individuals of their constitutional right to information and also the provision to the global community of accurate information about the most important events in Tajikistan.”

According to the Ministry of Culture there were over 300 print publications registered in the Republic of Tajikistan in 2009. Many of them do not contribute to freedom of speech

in the country, not because they do not want to but because they disappear very quickly. It should be borne in mind that it is very difficult today for new media to establish themselves in the market in Tajikistan. Although the most popular newspapers have a print run of up to 10,000 or 20,000 copies, this is quite poor in a country with a population of 7 million. Moreover, Tajik journalists have been discussing the question of a daily newspaper for many years at the most diverse levels in a wide variety of media. For the time being, however, no publication is ready either physically or financially to publish on a daily basis.

We must recognize that there is not one single country with an “absolutely free press” and that endeavours to achieve this aim are all there is. In a century of information technologies, every medium is owned by someone and consequently depends on the will of the owner. Information these days is a commodity. The market dictates its own rules and as such printed matter has a strong and hidden potential to influence public opinion.

We must also consider the readers and whether they are capable of understanding freedom of speech as the possibility to obtain information or just as the right to read criticism. Also, freedom of speech cannot happen at once; it needs to be fought for. The journalists in Tajikistan have the opportunity to do so, but do they want to?

Thank you for your attention.