



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Report on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Political Counselor Samuel Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
21 June 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Representative for Freedom of the Media has once again given the Permanent Council both a useful compilation of significant developments relating to freedom of expression for members of the media in the participating States and some useful observations about relations between media and the state.

Taking up Mr. Haraszi's country-by-country survey first, the United States has spoken frequently in this chamber and remains concerned about the unfavorable climate for free and independent media that undeniably persists in several participating States, as detailed once again by Mr. Haraszi. When we speak, we do so because we have all agreed that media freedom is an important pillar of the security foundation for a region that should be whole, free and at peace.

That is why we are grateful to Mr. Haraszi for his openness and courage to tackle blemishes, lapses or unresolved issues in many participating States, including my own, where journalistic freedom is well established and vigorous in its exercise.

As our Freedom of the Media Representative has highlighted, some of the most important principles that should guide the evolution of our laws and practices but have often been the source of concern include the following:

- Freedom of journalists and media organizations from violence and intimidation;
- Freedom to witness and report the news;
- A high degree of public access to governmental information;
- Decriminalization of libel;
- Uncensored right to publish and right of access to the Internet; and
- Fostering favorable conditions for developing independent and plural media that practice un-coerced self-regulation through voluntarily subscribed professional standards.

We view Mr. Haraszi's inventory of issues raised with participating States as a necessary service that his office is charged to perform, and we urge every participating State to accept them as a positive contribution to spur dialogue between government, media, and the rest of civil society.

Of special note, in the three months since Mr. Haraszti's last report, we have witnessed in our region several controversial situations involving public demonstrations and handling of media at them by police. Mr. Haraszti's office has accordingly compiled a special report filled with sensible observations and recommendations that we should all take seriously.

In particular, the report notes, "The very fact that a public demonstration takes place - whether it be sanctioned or unsanctioned - is certainly newsworthy, is of public interest and therefore, journalists should be protected by the same rights as if they were covering other public events". Addressing the issue of accreditation to cover political demonstrations, it goes on to state, "Accreditation is required only when access is necessarily restricted, such as access to the press gallery in a parliamentary building. In a public space, such as a town square, space is not limited and therefore there is no requirement for special accreditation."

These are sensible observations that we should all take into account. The report as a whole serves as a good blueprint for how police authorities should deal with journalists in covering political demonstrations. We commend Mr. Haraszti and his staff for this excellent contribution to good practices.

We shall look forward to Mr. Haraszti's next report and at the same time hope that we will all see a more positive trend line on this subject in our region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.