



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 29, 2010

The United States joins in extending a very warm welcome to Ms. Dunja Mijatovic to the Permanent Council for her first regular address as our Representative on Freedom of the Media. We thank you, Ms. Mijatovic, for your thorough report and for the efforts that you and your team have undertaken immediately upon assuming your post to strive for enhancing media freedom from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Unfortunately, this year, as in past years, we still face a landscape of growing threats and increasing dangers to media freedom and to the safety and well-being of journalists everywhere. We sincerely hope that by the end of your first three-year term as the Representative on Freedom of the Media, we will finally be able to say that these trends are being reversed; but I fear that unless concrete, pragmatic and urgent steps are taken, our hope will be in vain.

Among the most important measures that all participating States could take to improve the situation of media freedom in the OSCE, and to send a message of commitment to the most basic OSCE principles, is to decriminalize defamation. We join with the Representative in congratulating Armenia for taking this important step just over two months ago. We urge each participating State that criminalizes defamation to repeal such laws at the earliest opportunity, in keeping with our freely undertaken political commitments. States should be especially tolerant of speech and other forms of expression that are directed against government officials, actions and policies.

Secondly, we must address the air of impunity for those who commit violence against journalists. We still are waiting for justice in the murders of respected journalists such as Anna Politkovskaya and Paul Klebnikov. Objective, transparent investigations into the attacks on and murders of journalists, and prosecution of those determined responsible for these crimes are basic requirements for countries professing support for the rule of law. The incarceration of journalists because governments disapprove of their reporting—or because journalists have dared to investigate and report on powerful interests—threatens the state of media freedom throughout the OSCE region.

Thirdly, you rightly point to the new technologies as being in need of protection by OSCE participating States, along with the process of switching from analog to digital systems. It is vital that media pluralism not become a casualty of this process. In Turkey, for example, the government has blocked thousands of websites which constitutes a serious constriction of media freedom. In Armenia, recently passed legislative amendments will actually reduce the number of broadcast licenses, which already affect and restrict media pluralism.

Lastly, Ms. Mijatovic, we thank you for the excellent projects for which your office has taken an important leadership role. The Central Asian and the Caucasus Media Conferences are important venues for you to engage with journalists and state officials from different

backgrounds. Likewise, the expert legal analysis provided by your staff to participating States is invaluable.

Ms. Mijatovic, your tenure with the OSCE may not have been very long, but I think we can all agree that you have had an outstanding start at the helm of this vital institution. We thank you for your dedication, strongly support your institution, and wish you every continued success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.