

Conference

Mass Media in Armenia: 2010 Reflections and Trends for the Future

27 January 2011, Ballroom of the Congress Hotel, Yerevan

Opening remarks

Distinguished representatives of the Armenian Government; Embassies and International Organizations; civil society, media, dear ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, it is an honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all at this event.

In compliance with OSCE principles and commitments in respect to the freedoms of expression and media, the OSCE Office in Yerevan has been engaged in promoting free media in Armenia. A retrospective look over media related developments during last year shows that legal reform addressing convergence to digital broadcasting has been in the forefront because of its strong impact on the broadcasting media landscape. Therefore the OSCE attached special attention to digital transition related developments and implemented a series of activities in this area.

Among other things, last May the OSCE organized a conference at which the expert analysis on Armenia's Concept Paper on Digital Transition commissioned by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media was presented. We were privileged to have the presence of the media Freedom Representative Dunja Mijatovic, her staff members and OSCE experts at that event. Following her visit to Armenia, the Representative also facilitated a legal analysis on the amendments to Armenia's broadcasting legislation that I trust you all have had a chance to see.

In her subsequent statement on the adoption of draft amendments to broadcasting law, the Representative highlighted several problematic issues that have not found legal solutions and are still to be addressed. These solutions are necessary in order to achieve legislation that will promote and safeguard media freedom in the digital era. You will have an opportunity today to hear about these issues in detail from Andrei Richter, the OSCE expert who has provided several reviews on Armenia's broadcasting legislation.

Digitalization should bring more diversity and plurality in the broadcasting media landscape. Well-thought switchover policies and sound legal framework

are crucial for a successful transition. It is regretful that relevant legal remedies did not precede broadcasting license tenders last year that determined media players for the next ten years.

This said I would like to stress the importance of elaborating further amendments to broadcasting legislation. Availing of this opportunity I would like to urge the Working Group on media issues initiated last year by the President of Armenia and headed by the Armenian Human Rights Defender, to expedite its efforts in elaborating these amendments. I am confident that with genuine will and unified efforts of governmental, civil society and international stakeholders, it will be possible to address the existing legal loopholes and bring positive change in the media sector.

Other important developments during the year in the media freedom area included decriminalization of libel and insult in Armenia. In her report to the Permanent Council of the OSCE last year, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media welcomed this step urging other OSCE pSs that have criminalized defamation to repeal such laws and handle such offences in the civil law domain. In this context I would like to stress the importance of the advancement of sound media self-regulation mechanisms that will help to achieve out of court solution of defamation related disputes and foster professional and ethical journalism. We stand ready to continue our support in this area to help Armenia achieve truly functional media self-regulation institution.

Freedom of the media will remain a mere promise if journalists and media outlets do not enjoy safe working environment. Together with the Office of the Media Freedom Representative the Office has been closely monitoring the alleged cases of violence and intimidation against media professionals liaising with the law enforcement on this issue. We have been stressing that the disclosure of those standing behind these crimes will help prevent other such acts in the future and the chilling effect they may have on the journalists and media. The representatives of the media community will say more today on this issue.

One of the main principles of management and good governance is feedback. Mass media have a crucial role in providing this feedback in good governance and therefore promotion of media freedom should be of interest to everyone.

I wish all of us constructive discussions.

Thank you for your attention.