

How to Improve the freedom of expression/media freedom in Europe?

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The EFJ appreciates very much that the Commission is organising such a huge important conference and the fact that almost 500 persons registered is the best sign, that is was overdue and urgent. Thank you!

There is a crisis in journalism (not only due to the financial crisis and the online revolution), there is a crisis when it comes to media freedom and professional journalism within the European Union but even more in the countries this conference is covering. Turkey is obviously Nr 1 when it comes to threatening and imprisoning journalists and using its Anti-Terror Law. Increasing pressure by local journalists and media organisations and by International actors including CoE, OSCE, EP and European Commission has at least helped to create a strong united opposition within the Turkish journalists’ community with our affiliates at the forefront. We just had a delegation of Turkish journalists visiting journalists in prison, and the EFJ Vice president had to remain outside as a foreign journalist...

In all Balkan countries the situation of the media is extremely vulnerable and weak. But before I will formulate in the coming minutes four “urgent appeals” or recommendations to improve the situation of journalism in the Balkan and in Turkey.

However, let me side track a moment to the EU itself.

What a coincidence it was: at the moment Hungary is taking for the first time ever the EU Presidency, parliamentarians in Budapest agreed to create a new media council which has the power to fine newspapers if they don't provide "balanced coverage." This reminded many organisations and citizens including the EFJ of the times of the political controls of journalism and media during the communist era. But if it had not been for the mediatic coincidence of the Hungarian presidency, this completely unaccepted media law may have been only yet another footnote in European media and not worth much political action at EU level.

However, it has created a **new momentum** within the European Parliament and hopefully the European Commission, and media watch dog organisations including the OSCE helped to put pressure on EU institutions to stop saying that the press and media are of purely national concern and that the EU has no role in it. This had been the argumentation up to now when it came to agreeing a directive on pluralism and media freedom or protesting against the completely unacceptable conflict of interest regarding for example Prime Minister Berlusconi and his media empire... For that we are grateful for Commissioner Kroes not only technical comments to the media law.

And it is worth mentioning in this new momentum the adoption of the Lisbon treaty and its legally binding Charter for Fundamental Rights and its article 11 on **safeguarding the freedom and pluralism of media, freedom of expression and freedom to receive and communicate information without interference or pressure from public authorities** as well as the European Convention of Human Rights as part of the EU acquis.

As drafted in a recent EP resolution on Media Law in Hungary, not only should the media law be reviewed, the Commission is asked to work on a directive on media freedom and pluralism “hereby overcoming the inadequate EU legislative framework on media.

One can say Hungary and its media law is the peak of the iceberg of recent developments in the EU with regard to media freedom. But the extremely critical situation in new member states such as Rumania and Bulgaria for example are worth mentioning as well.

Balkan stands still or again for politicisation of media, lack of transparency, lack of professionalism- all named so well in the great contributions to be found on the speak up website- indeed a great resource with analysis and concrete proposals for action.

So first urgent appeal: If we want that the candidate countries and those who are lining up and in particular their governments take European institutions seriously, the EU should start taking **media freedom as a fundamental right and cornerstone of democracy** more seriously. Implement the Article 11 of the Charter!

We appreciate at this point the announced establishment of a multi stakeholder group on media as a welcomed step. We would also appreciate as mentioned by others some EU guidelines on transparency of ownership, more discussion on conflict of interest laws etc..

Second urgent appeal: The crisis in journalism has hit in particular the Balkan. It is time for a new approach: **Journalism as a public good** is in the service of all of us, so there must be a wide-ranging and inclusive public discussion about all aspects of media freedom at local, national and European level. Better cooperation between media organisations, human rights and civil society groups as well as the different European institutions including OSCE and the CoE is important in this respect. It would be excellent if the Commission could take a lead together with the other actors in getting such national debates off the ground involving all major stakeholders (unions, broadcasters, publishers, politicians, press councils, universities etc...)

Third urgent appeal: There can be no press freedom, if journalists live in conditions of corruption, poverty and fear. Unfortunately, journalists in the region are extremely weak, fragmented, increasingly work as false freelances without any form of written contract and in the almost complete hands of either the employers or even worse the politicians. Journalists and other media workers often lack **basic legal and social protection** of their rights and when **trade unions** are weak, they have hardly any way to stand up for their rights.

We'd appreciate support for local unions and associations, who are the only players who can defend and fight for journalists' social and professional rights. Put pressure on governments for example in Turkey, Serbia and Croatia that unions also have the right to organize the freelance journalists – which now is forbidden- or those without a contract, as they need union support most and are becoming a majority in the profession.

Sometimes unions/associations need to change themselves and become reformed and more transparent. Financial support; get the right framework for social dialogue to improve

journalists' working conditions. Uphold ILO and European standards in all media (national and foreign owned). Support from outside in expertise.

Fourth Urgent appeal: Supporting **training** for journalists but also government officials and politicians about what independent media means, for example what protection of sources means and what conditions are required for journalists to do their job in the region. (good example with OLAF-regular meetings between police inspectors and journalist to better understand each other when it comes to issues of corruption). Training on ethical journalism, media accountability of course as well.

And last but not least: follow-up of the certainly important conclusions coming out of this overdue important seminar.