



PC.DEL/577/08

3 July 2008

ENGLISH only

Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union Européenne

**Conseil Permanent No. 719
3 juillet 2008**

EU Response to the Representative for the Freedom Of the Media

The European Union welcomes Mr. Haraszi to this meeting of the Permanent Council and thanks him for his regular report. We share the concerns which he expressed on World Press Freedom Day about violence against journalists and the impunity which often accompanies it.

The EU welcomes the fact that the Representative exercises his mandate impartially throughout the OSCE area. Those EU Member States which are the subject of comment in his report have taken careful note of the points made and will maintain close contact with his office. The report mentions developments in some 22 participating States and, as always, reflects both positive and negative trends.

In the Permanent Council of 19 June the EU urged the authorities of Belarus to continue their co-operation with the Representative, including by giving due consideration to the comments and recommendations provided by his Office with regard to the draft law "On Mass Media" which was then under consideration in the Belarusian National Assembly. The EU regrets therefore the passage of this law in both chambers of the Belarusian Parliament without significant amendment.

Regarding Azerbaijan, we have previously expressed concern at the situation of the media in that country and the report of the Representative suggests that a pattern of abuse of State power and harassment of independent journalists continues. We urge the authorities of Azerbaijan to cooperate closely with the Representative to bring the media environment in their country more closely in line with their OSCE commitments.

As regards Armenia, we hope that the Government will move swiftly to give effect to the 17 June decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of the TV station A1+.

We are pleased to note the positive developments mentioned by the Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Russian Federation and Republic of Moldova. Concerning the latter, however, at this crucial time before the upcoming elections in Spring 2009, we would have liked to hear a more detailed account. Putting legislation into place is one task, implementing is another; the main focus should therefore be the state of implementation of this legislation.

The EU notes with approval the programme of visits to participating States undertaken by the Representative. These play an important role in raising awareness of OSCE commitments. We welcome the publication of the Guidebook on Media Self-Regulation, and encourage the Representative to continue his work in this important area which must develop in parallel with government self-restraint in handling of media. We continue to support the legal reviews of media legislation. The EU attaches importance to the project work of the office and supports the programme of work outlined for the remainder of this year.

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Finally the EU would like to thank Mr. Haraszti once again for his report and wish him continued success in his important tasks.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Island and Norway align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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