



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Representative on Freedom of the Media

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Communique by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the accreditation of foreign journalists for implementing the right to freedom of information

Accreditation or official recognition of foreign journalists is a core element of the Helsinki Final Act and other commitments that OSCE participating States have agreed upon. The issue of press accreditation has recently become an increasing concern. Freedom to perform journalistic duties abroad is crucial for strengthening a climate of trust and co-operation within the OSCE region. I have expressed my concern on numerous occasions about abuses of accreditation practices for foreign journalists that have recently become much more frequent.

Today I launch a report (www.osce.org/fom/245146) that focuses on both the theoretical and practical issues surrounding accreditation. It examines international standards and scholarly approaches in order to clarify the legal nature of accreditation and to explore the specifics of accreditation for foreign journalists in the OSCE region.

Experts on international media law and freedom of expression generally agree that accreditation standards on behalf of public authorities is an appropriate measure for specific situations such as within conflict zones, private or official events or in locations with a limited crowd capacity. Any accreditation requirements, however, must be in compliance with the conditions established in Article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 10(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The report presents positive and negative accreditation practices. It also sets forth recommendations on how to bring accreditation standards for foreign journalists in line with international standards and OSCE commitments on the free flow of information across borders.

The report highlights that accreditation standards for foreign journalists in some participating States are often perceived and utilized as a form of work permit. This is inconsistent with OSCE commitments and international standards on freedom of the media. Accreditation should be used to ensure additional privileges be given to those media actors officially recognized by an accrediting public agency.

I note that international standards make a minor distinction between accreditation for foreign journalists and general press accreditation rules; the former involves additional privileges such as multiple-entry visas, residence permits, travel assistance and the like.

Based on the report I recommend that participating States review their rules on accreditation for foreign correspondents (whenever they exist) to bring them in line with OSCE commitments on media freedom, including the Helsinki Final Act:

- (i) Accreditation for foreign journalists should not be a precondition to obtain a visa or to enter a country;
- (ii) Accreditation rules should act as an enabling tool for foreign journalists to carry out their work;
- (iii) Accreditation rules should be clear and transparent in their terms and conditions, as well as grounds for denial and withdrawal;
- (iv) Freelance journalists should have the same rights to be granted accreditation;
- (v) Accreditation should not serve as a tool to control content, restrict the flow of information across borders, or as a sanction in response to alien propaganda.

I intend to distribute a questionnaire to OSCE participating States on press accreditation standards to construct a more complete picture of accreditation practices throughout the OSCE region.

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