



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media

Amsterdam Recommendations

14 June 2003

Freedom of the Media and the Internet

Convinced that no matter what technical means are used to channel the work of journalists to the public – be it TV, radio, newspapers or the Internet – the basic constitutional value of freedom of the media must not be questioned;

Reaffirming that this principle, which is older than most of today's media, is one that all modern European societies are committed to;

Alarmed that censorship is being imposed on the Internet and new measures are being developed to prevent the free flow of information;

Reaffirming the principles expressed in the Joint Statement by OSCE, UN and OAS in London on 20 November 2001;

Taking note of the Council of Europe Declaration on freedom of communication on the Internet from 28 May 2003;

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media invited representatives from academia, media, specialised NGOs from Europe and the U.S. as well as from the European Parliament, Council of Europe, European Commission, and OSCE to take part in a conference on “Freedom of the Media and the Internet” held 13-14 June 2003 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

During the conference the following recommendations, proposed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, were made:

Access

- The Internet provides a number of different services. Some of them are still in the development phase. They serve as tools, often indispensable ones, for citizens as well as journalists and thus are important for a free media landscape. The technology as such must not be held responsible for any potential misuse. Innovation must not be hampered.
- Access to digital networks and the Internet must be fostered. Barriers at all levels, be they technical, structural or educational, must be dismantled.
- To a considerable extent the fast pace of innovation of digital networks is due to the fact that most of the basic code and software are in the public domain, free for everyone to use and enhance. This free-of-charge infrastructure is one of the key elements of freedom of expression on the Internet. Access to the public domain is important for both technical and cultural innovation and must not be endangered through the adoption of new provisions related to patent and copyright law.

Freedom of Expression

- The advantages of a vast network of online resources and the free flow of information outweigh the dangers of misusing the Internet. But criminal exploitation of the Internet cannot be tolerated. Illegal content must be prosecuted in the country of its origin but all legislative and law enforcement activity must clearly target only illegal content and not the infrastructure of the Internet itself.
- The global prosecution of criminal content, such as child pornography, must be warranted and also on the Internet all existing laws must be observed. However, the basic principle of freedom of expression must not be confined and there is no need for new legislation.
- In a modern democratic and civil society citizens themselves should make the decision on what they want to access on the Internet. The right to disseminate and to receive information is a basic human right. All mechanisms for filtering or blocking content are not acceptable.
- Any means of censorship that are unacceptable within the 'classic media' must not be used for online media. New forms of censorship must not be developed.

Education

- Computer and Internet literacy must be fostered in order to strengthen the technical understanding of the importance of software and code. This is necessary so as to keep open a window of opportunity for defining the future role of the Internet and its place in civil society.
- Internet literacy must be a primary educational goal in school, training courses should also be set up for adults. Special training of journalists should be introduced in order to facilitate their ability to deal with online content and to ensure a high standard of professional journalism.

Professional Journalism

- More and more people are able to share their views with a widening audience through the Internet without resorting to 'classic media'. Privacy of communication between individuals must be respected. The infrastructure of the Internet is used for many different purposes and any relevant regulatory bodies must be aware of that.
- Journalism is changing in the digital era and new media forms are developing that deserve the same protection as 'classic media'.
- Traditional and widely accepted values of professional journalism, acknowledging the responsibility of journalists, should be fostered so as to guarantee a free and responsible media in the digital era.