



18TH CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA CONFERENCE

Multi-faceted challenges to media freedom in Central Asia

13-14 December 2016, Vienna, Austria

RECOMMENDATIONS

This document summarizes recommendations of more than 60 journalists, representatives of government, civil society and academia from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan along with participants from Mongolia and international experts at the 18th annual Central Asian Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 13-14 December 2016 in Vienna, Austria.

The public's right to information is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression. Participating States must recognize that both the general public and authorities need information and insight on such an urgent and compelling problem as terrorism. Freedom of expression is a prerequisite to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism. It can play a critical role in promoting equality and combating intolerance. The media, as well as the Internet and other digital technologies have an essential role in keeping society informed. Even in difficult times, governments must create environments conducive to the free flow of information and take particular care not to adopt restrictive measures.

The conference participants agreed upon the following:

- 1) Counter-terrorism measures which are bound to restrict the freedom of expression and free media should comply with international standards, in particular Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and a stringent test should be applied, comprising the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality. These should be implemented in accordance with the rule of law standards.
- 2) The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media should assist participating States in abiding by their commitments in the field of media freedom while pursuing the legitimate aim of protecting their citizens from the acts of terror.
- 3) Participating States should ensure that definitions of 'terrorism' and 'extremism' in their national law are clear enough and are based on international human rights standards.
- 4) Participating States should consider ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention of Cybercrime to establish a common legal framework for preventing cyber-terrorism.

- 5) Governments' surveillance programmes aimed at countering extremist views online should be implemented strictly within the framework of the national law and with independent judicial oversight.
- 6) The right of journalists to maintain the confidentiality of their sources must be protected also when reporting on terrorist-related activities. Authorities should not use criminal or national security measures as a justification to overturn journalists' rights.
- 7) Participating States should sustain and develop education and training programmes in media and digital literacy in the context of countering extremism.
- 8) Media regulation should take place without undue political or economic interference.
- 9) Effective self-regulatory instruments should be introduced wherever necessary and strengthened wherever they exist to facilitate a flexible and non-intrusive framework vis-à-vis rights and responsibilities of media and journalists in the digital media environment.
- 10) Digitalization policies and regulations need to particularly take into consideration the important role that regional and local broadcasters play vis-à-vis their respective communities, as well as the role of trans-border broadcasting from one Central Asian nation to another.
- 11) Appeal to the OSCE participating States to release all journalists and bloggers interned and serving prison sentences.
- 12) Appeal to the OSCE participating States not to rely on blocking news and current affairs websites unless their core content promotes illegal violence or terrorism as identified as such by the courts of law.