



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

**8<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference  
Pluralism and Internet governance**

**Tbilisi, Georgia  
20-21 October 2011**

**DECLARATION**

The 8<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference was organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media with the assistance of the OSCE Offices in Baku and Yerevan and held on 20-21 October 2011 in Tbilisi, Georgia. Throughout the years the South Caucasus Media Conference has become a unique forum to discuss media issues and co-operation among journalists of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The two-day conference hosted more than 70 government officials, parliamentarians, journalists, media experts and civil society representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

The focus of the conference was Internet regulation and media pluralism. Participants discussed the role of the Internet in promoting pluralism in the OSCE region and South Caucasus in particular, analyzed international standards and practices in this field, assessed the opportunities provided by self-regulatory independent bodies in fostering pluralism on the Internet, exchanged experiences, as well as shared with the latest developments in the field of media freedom in South Caucasus.

*The Conference:*

1. Welcomes the fact that representatives of the media, civil society and government representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia took part in the conference, acknowledging the importance of regional co-operation in the field of media.
2. Acknowledges that citizen journalism on the Internet and blogging activity are civil activities.
3. Calls on governments to put in place all necessary legislative and technological parameters to facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information, including through modern information and communication technologies.
4. Urges the governments to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of expression and opinion in the countries of South Caucasus, as guaranteed by OSCE commitments and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

5. Highlights that access to the Internet and access to online information should be recognized by national legislation and regarded as inherent to the right to free information and expression.
6. Emphasizes that the Internet offers unique opportunities to foster the free flow of information, which is a basic OSCE commitment.
7. Stresses that the right to freedom of expression applies not only to traditional means of communication, but also to new media, including the Internet. Any limitations or restrictions to this right can only be justified if in the public interest, necessary in a democratic society, prescribed by law and if proportionate.
8. Urges governments to avoid using blocking of Internet resources as a means of interference. Blocking can be justified only if conducted in accordance with international norms and standards, as well as only if necessary in a democratic society and if they are provided for by law, in pursuit of a legitimate aim.
9. Calls on the governments to avoid vague legal provisions when regulating speech and to ensure that implementation of laws and practices are transparent and open to appeal.
10. Urges all three governments to foster pluralism and refrain from harassment and monopolization of media.
11. Emphasizes that media pluralism is a key value and one of the most important conditions for the existence of a democratic society in which Internet plays a crucial role.
12. Calls on the governments to support the development of affordable and high-quality Internet connection and to create favorable conditions for healthy competition among Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in order to provide all citizens, including those living in rural and remote areas, with access to the Internet.
13. Stresses that ISPs should not be subjected to governmental procedures, except for those that are applicable to any other businesses. Furthermore, ISPs should not be liable for content generated by others, which is disseminated by their service as long as they do not intervene in that content or refuse to obey a court order to remove illegal content.
14. Emphasizes that network neutrality should be respected, so online information and traffic are treated equally regardless of the device, content, author, origin or destination of information.
15. Calls on the governments to ensure that Internet service providers respect the principle of network neutrality and make transparent their data traffic management policies.

16. Urges the governments to consult with and involve civil society in Internet governance policy development.

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