



OSCE
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Promotion of Pluralism in New Media
7-8 July 2011
Hofburg-Vienna
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Thank you Mr. Chairman

I would like to contribute on the issue of media, pluralism, and minorities.

Taking into consideration that OSCE member states are aiming to ensure the freedom of expression of information and media,

Recalling that OSCE has rightfully recognized that independent media and freedom of expression are the basic elements for stable and peaceful societies,

Recalling that Freedom of the media is the collective embodiment of the freedom of expression and pluralism in media is a fundamental requirement of expression of different opinions and guarantee of individuals and abilities to express their opinions without interference,

Reaffirming that freedom of expression is considered as a basic human right,

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association would like to highlight that for the development of the societies, pluralism and diversity is a necessity. Hence, more importance should be given to the differences and otherness. In this line, we believe that the empowerment of minority media is one of the most effective ways of disseminating genuine pluralism in multiethnic societies.

The access to media of different opinions and Minorities' voices should be considered as a key element of media pluralism.

The recognition and preservation of the cultural identity of individuals and groups have garnered attention in recent years. Several developments however have complicated the achievement of genuine political and cultural pluralism as a vital component of freedom of expression, free flow of information and free media.

Minority groups across OSCE region started expressing fresh or renewed interest in gaining ownership of their political social and cultural identities and engaged in actions towards their expression, broader recognition and cultivation. Among these actions has been the demand for improved access to internet, print and broadcast media.

Majority of the member states of OSCE took steps towards reviewing their legislations for the protection and broadening of freedom of expression, providing₁



easy access to media, creating viable conditions to accommodate diverse voices in the society, including the minorities.

However, as in many other OSCE Member States, today minority media in Greece is still subject to discrimination, selective restrictions and exclusion.

New media licencing legislation (No: 3592/2007) has been as passed by the Parliament on 5 July 2007 and signed by the President into law on 19 July 2007 brought upon numerous restrictive provisions which endanger freedom of press, expression and dissemination of information.

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, expressed concern that “the law endangers pluralism by putting a high threshold for minority, community or low-cost broadcasters.

"The law sets unnecessarily rigid requirements for obtaining a radio broadcasting. For music radio stations, the conditions to obtain a license include a minimum of 3 to 5 full-time staff members; for news channels with a bigger outreach the number of staff rises to 20, and a minimum deposit of between 30,000 and 100,000 euros are required respectively. Additionally, a licence will only be granted to 24-hour broadcasters, and main transmission language must be Greek.

"OSCE commitments regarding pluralism of views require that all communities have access to the flow information and can contribute to it. Every government has a responsibility to facilitate respect and inclusiveness."

Small minority radio stations broadcasting in the prefectures of Rhodopi and Xanthi face serious difficulties in meeting these restrictive provisions. By limiting the usage of the Turkish language, the new law also endangers pluralism and minority rights.

Furthermore, Minority Newspapers “Gudem” and “Millet” have been recently penalized by court orders to pay 150 hundred thousand Euros and 120 hundred thousand Euros respectively, as a result of a law suit, under accusations that they have published unsubstantiated news articles about a government appointed Greek teacher working at a minority school in Western Thrace. According to the first court decision the sentence could result in the closure of the two newspapers and also imprisonment of two journalists unless they pay the fines ordered by the court. The warrant of attachment arrived to both newspapers on 4th April 2011. Subsequently bank accounts of the owners of the newspapers and the journalists have been blocked. Currently the cases are brought before the Court of Appeals. Both cases will be seen on 24th February 2012.

The situation of the minority media in Greece and the case of two minority newspapers are reflected in the regular reports to the Permanent Council prepared by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Dunja Mijatovic. (7th March 2011 – 23rd June 2011). Recently, SEEMO and FUEN expressed their



concerns over excessive fines imposed on the mentioned two Minority Newspapers in Greece.

In the light to the information above, we call upon the Greek Government:

- To respect the right to freedom of expression and press freedoms, in particular the rights of smaller and minority press in order to protect and enrich pluralism, diversity and freedom of opinion in the media,
- To amend the media licence law in a way to prevent that the amount of fines and compensations be fair and do not enrich the claimant, and are kept confined to compensating the moral loss, if any, of the claimant,
- To reconsider and revise the relevant legislation and ensure that the principles of equality and pluralism are guaranteed for all the segments of the society, including Turkish minority of Western Thrace.

Thank you very much for your attention.