

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

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Freedom of Expression, Media and Information in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijani authorities consider ensuring freedom of speech and the press, media development one of the main directions of state policy. At present more than 5000 media are officially registered in Azerbaijan. By the number of media, Azerbaijan is one of the leaders in the CIS and Eastern Europe. The country publishes up to 40 daily, more than 200 weekly and monthly newspapers, magazines and other media, about 300 news and analytical websites, about 20 news agencies, and about 100 media outlets in the regions. In Azerbaijan, there are 11 republican, 4 satellite, 13 regional and 17 cable television, 25 Internet television, 14 radio. More than 50 journalistic organizations are registered in Azerbaijan, about 30 organizations are actively involved in strengthening freedom of speech and information, economic independence of the press, protecting the rights of journalists, regulating relations between society and the media, and other issues. The number of independent commercial companies that distribute printed matter reached 23. Now in our country more than 80 percent of the population are Internet users. The number of websites registered on the Az domain. exceeded 20 thousand.

The freedom of speech and information is ensured in Azerbaijan, a regulatory and legal basis has been developed based on the international standards to regulate this area, hundreds of media outlets act freely. Therefore, it is wrong to express concern about the freedom of the press in Azerbaijan, to talk about the closure of media outlets, the torture of journalists, the arrests of human rights defenders, to make statements about impunity, which completely contradicts the existing reality.

Azerbaijan's Internet media is also successfully continuing its activities. About 3 million people in our country use social networks. Azerbaijan is a legal, democratic country and a country, where the rule of law is ensured. We are open to continue dialogue with civil society that can be helpful on development of society and solving issues that concerned both sides, it is in our interest. Anyone, regardless of his position and social status, or anyone who violates laws, journalism ethics and norms, who has committed an illegal act under the guise of a representative of the media should be responsible for this. Profession is not the guarantee to act illegally.

The Azerbaijani state takes consistent steps to further develop the freedom of speech and information, as well as to ensure the safety of journalists; transparency and responsible media approach and intends to continue its efforts in the future, and is ready for open dialogue on these issues with all international structures and local organizations.

Exercise of the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities. Journalist must strictly follow laws and regulations, including

appropriate accreditation procedure. Especially when it concerns so-called separatist regime. If warranted by the security situation, states can apply travel restrictions to certain areas within its territory, affected by conflicts, which is in full conformity with national laws and relevant provisions of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including those prescribed in Article 19. If media representatives fail to respect national legislation of the host country, international norms and standards that also is a part of democratic values, then we have every reason to question objectivity, impartiality and professionalism of journalists, which turn into tool to incite violence and violation of international law, foment tensions and promote situations created through unlawful use of force.

Armenia broke out a lengthy war against Azerbaijan laying territorial claims on its South Caucasus neighbor. Since a war in the early 1990s, Armenian armed forces have occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding regions. More than 20,000 Azerbaijanis were killed and over 1 million were displaced as a result of the large-scale hostilities.

Armenia has not yet implemented four UN Security Council resolutions on withdrawal of its armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding districts.

Unauthorized visits to Nagorno-Karabakh and other regions of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia are considered illegal, and any individuals paying such visits are included in the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry's "black list".

Therefore, as all member here get already informed and did not recognized that so called separatist regime, Azerbaijan pay special attention to the illegal activity in the occupied areas of Azerbaijan. Baku has repeatedly warned foreign officials and diplomats of illegality of visits to its territories that are occupied by Armenia, calling them contradictory to international law as well as democratic values. The work is constantly carried out to prevent such illegal actions in the region.

Summarizing the above mentioned, it can be concluded that the Azerbaijani government considers ensuring freedom of speech, expression, information and press, the development of the mass media outlets as one of the main directions of state policy