



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 706
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EU statement in response to the report by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Miklós Haraszti

The European Union is pleased to welcome Mr. Miklós Haraszti, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, to the Permanent Council once again and thanks him for his report.

While we have already issued a statement during the seminar of 29 February marking the tenth anniversary of the Institution, we should like to take this further opportunity to emphasise the importance which the EU attaches to the work of the Representative and his office. Free and independent media are at the core of democracy and a democratic society is not possible in their absence. We reaffirm our complete acceptance of our commitments in this area and reject attempts to limit commitments through relativism or on the false basis that their implementation constitutes interference in internal affairs.

The EU notes that the work of the Representative since his last report has ranged across the OSCE area. We welcome the wide range of his activity and consider it one of the strengths of the Institution. We note his comments on a large number of participating states and assure him that those EU Member States, which are the subject of comment, will study his report carefully and maintain close contact with his office.

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We share the concern expressed by the Representative on the implications for the media of the State of Emergency recently imposed in Armenia and trust that the Armenian authorities will respond promptly to the questions he has raised.

The situation of the media in Azerbaijan is a matter for grave concern. The case of Eynulla Fatullayev remains of particular interest to the EU and we are disappointed that he remains in prison. The harsh sentences imposed on Ayvaz Zeynalli, Vugar Gurdganli and Mushfig Huseynov suggest that the trend of intimidating journalists and repressing the free practise of journalism is continuing in that country. The sentence against Ganimat Zahidov, editor of the opposition newspaper Azadliq, of which we learned this week is further disturbing confirmation of the existence of such a trend, which is particularly worrying in light of the presidential elections that will take place in Azerbaijan on 15 October 2008. We call on the authorities of Azerbaijan to live up to their OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and to implement fully and without delay the jointly agreed reforms included in the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan. The EU encourages the Representative to maintain close contact with the authorities and to keep the Permanent Council informed of developments.

The EU notes that the sentence imposed on Belarusian journalist, Alexander Zdvizhkov, was reduced on appeal and that this resulted in his immediate release. However, the closure of the newspaper Novy Chas raises serious concerns. We are pleased that cooperation between the Representative and the Belarusian government on the draft law on information is continuing and we urge the Belarusian authorities to take full advantage of the expertise offered by the Office to move towards the full implementation of all OSCE commitments in this area.

Developments in Georgia and, in particular, events surrounding the broadcaster Imedi TV have been followed closely by the EU. We shall continue to monitor the situation closely, especially in the run up to the Parliamentary elections in May, which will be an important

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opportunity for the Georgian government to demonstrate its commitment to the independence and pluralism of the media.

We note the work being done by the Representative in Kazakhstan and share his hope that the legislation referred to in Minister Yertysbayev's address to the Permanent Council last July will soon be enacted. The situation of the internet based media in Kazakhstan is also of concern and we urge the Representative to pay particularly close attention to this area.

The analysis of media trends in the Russian Federation prior to the Duma elections in December and the recent Presidential elections are of considerable interest. Credible independent monitoring of media activity and access, throughout an election campaign, is an important element in assuring voters and candidates that elections conform to international commitments.

We note the difficulties faced by journalists in Serbia during recent unrest related to developments in Kosovo. It is particularly important that journalists should be able to pursue their work and that media freedom should be protected at times of tension or high emotion.

The amnesty granted to Umida Niyazova in Uzbekistan is a positive development for that country. However, the continued refusal of the authorities to allow the entry of material published by the Office of the Representative is disturbing and should be resolved in compliance with the OSCE commitments to which Uzbekistan freely subscribed.

We welcome the follow up to his report on the "Handling of journalists during political demonstrations" provided by Mr. Haraszti. It is clear that this issue requires further attention in a large number of participating states and we recommend that the suggestions contained in the report be studied by all participating States.

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We are grateful for the information provided by Mr. Haraszti on recent activities of his office and for the indication of activities it is intended to undertake in the coming months. We fully support the activities proposed.

Finally the EU would like to thank Mr. Haraszti once again for his report and to wish him continued success in his important tasks.

The candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Norway align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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