



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Media Freedom in Tajikistan

As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 4, 2010

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The United States notes with serious concern recent developments in Tajikistan that appear to limit media access and media freedom while increasing pressure on independent media.

We share the concerns expressed by the Delegation of Belgium on behalf of the European Union on October 28, and by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Dunja Mijatovic. In her statement of October 18, Ms. Mijatovic called upon Tajik officials to recognize the importance of maintaining media pluralism and to reverse the ongoing deterioration of the media freedom situation in Tajikistan.

In response, the Delegation of Tajikistan stated that "Tajikistan does not have an official policy on Internet filtering" and that publication of newspapers had been suspended due to "technical problems." It appears, however, that the government of Tajikistan in fact ordered internet service providers to block five websites and ordered publishing houses to cease publication of three independent newspapers.

We note that in mid-October the Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications sent a letter to several internet service providers ordering them to block four of these websites in order to "protect the information security of the nation." There are credible reports that government officials ordered printing houses to stop printing the three newspapers because they published material perceived to be critical of government officials.

We take strong exception to the October 4 statement by the Minister of Defense, General Sherali Khairulloev, that journalists who reported on the government's response to the security situation in the Rasht Valley were providing cover for terrorists and committing a serious crime.

Lawsuits brought against independent newspapers Asia Plus, Farazh, Ozodagon, Paykon, and Millat remain active. As the Representative on the Freedom of the Media warns, if court decisions to award disproportionate damages in libel lawsuits brought on by public officials are not reconsidered by the higher courts, these publications could face closure.

These tactics, along with launching tax or prosecutorial inspections by authorities against journalists and printers is no less than what Ms. Mijatovic calls it: a case of serious non-compliance with Tajikistan's OSCE media freedom commitments and we call on the government of Tajikistan to reverse this course at once. Specifically, we call on the Tajik authorities to stop pressuring printing houses and newspapers, cease blockage of independent websites, and stop using tax authorities to harass independent news outlets.

Thank you Mister Chairman.