



**The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Dunja Mijatović**

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PRESS RELEASE

OSCE media freedom representative on visit to Tajikistan welcomes co-operation, offers assistance to strengthen pluralism, reform legislation

DUSHANBE, 4 November 2011 - The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, during her official three-day visit to Tajikistan starting today offered to the country's authorities assistance and expertise of her Office to promote media pluralism and reform legislation.

During her visit Mijatović met with Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi, Interior Minister Abdurahim Kahorov, members of the Parliament Olim Salimzoda and Akramsho Felaliev, the Head of the Committee on Television and Radio under the Government of Tajikistan Asadullo Rahmonov, the Head of Tajik Communication Service Beg Zuhurov, media non-governmental organizations and journalists.

"I appreciate the fact that Tajikistan's doors are open for me and my Office's expertise and assistance," said Mijatović, who was invited by Tajikistan Foreign Minister. "My visit is very timely: legal reforms in the media sphere are planned and the preparations to switch to digital broadcasting are underway. I had constructive and fruitful discussions with the authorities and trust that steps to promote media pluralism in broadcasting and print media will be taken."

Mijatović offered her Office's assistance to reform the Mass Media Law and the Law on Broadcasting in Tajikistan to reflect the OSCE commitments as well as the upcoming digitalization, which she called "a good opportunity to develop Tajikistan's broadcast sector".

"Both state and privately-owned media should benefit from the upcoming digital switchover," Mijatović added. "For the sake of pluralism, the state should gradually separate from its monopoly in the nationwide broadcasting TV. The time has come for a nationwide private broadcaster, and for more private regional and local print media."

Referring to the recent civil law suits against print media filed by high-level governmental officials, the Representative called on the authorities to decriminalize defamation and make the civil court system fair for media defendants. "High demands in compensation in civil cases have nearly the same chilling effect on free media as criminal convictions," Mijatović stressed.

“It is crucial for the productive public discourse, that public officials have a higher degree of tolerance and do not view criticism in the media as attacks against their personal rights.” She added that the Media Council, established in Tajikistan two years ago with assistance from the OSCE, could serve as the platform to adjudicate conflicts on the journalistic materials.

Mijatović said she was looking forward to conducting several joint activities agreed with the Tajik authorities, including workshops on interaction between media and governmental spokespersons, as well as law enforcement professionals, which would be implemented together with the OSCE Office in Dushanbe. She also expressed her appreciation to the authorities for their readiness to have the upcoming Central Asia Media Conference in Dushanbe on 29 and 30 November this year.

Ambassador Vikki, the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan took part in the meetings.

The Representative also had a separate meeting with BBC reporter Urunboi Usmanov and Nuri Zindagi correspondent Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov, both of whom were recently released from jail, as well as with Hikmatullo Saifullozoda, a newspaper editor-in-chief who had been attacked earlier this year.

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