

Statement Regarding Journalists' Accreditation Procedure at the RA CEC

March 7, 2012

Pursuant to the Journalists' Accreditation Procedure at the RA Central Electoral Commission, approved by CEC on January 31, 2012, the accreditation of journalists is ongoing. Despite that, Point 2 of Article 3 of the Procedure emphasizes that CEC "ensures equal opportunities for all journalists", some of its provisions raise concern. Particularly, the following reasons for denial or termination of accreditation, envisioned in Articles 9 and 11, are of worry: a journalist is denied of accreditation or his/her accreditation is terminated if "he/she disseminated untrue information about the activities of the electoral commissions (official figures)" or "was condemned for premeditated crime and his/her convictions are not expired or expunged".

These grounds for denial or termination of accreditation are not acceptable for the following reasons:

- The given Procedure sets such restrictions of rights, which must be envisioned only in a law and not in a bylaw;
- The rights of the media imply an opportunity for an independent and free selection of those journalists who will report on electoral processes. This right should not be anyhow restricted, including by the CEC;
- Given that in the upcoming months the major part of media representatives will be engaged in the elections coverage, the Procedure virtually might become a ban on profession: depriving a journalist from accreditation for his/her "past sins" is unacceptable for a country striving for democratic values;
- As a ground for denial or termination of accreditation the Procedure stipulates the dissemination of untrue information about the activities of the electoral commissions. CEC indirectly defines some enhanced guarantees for protecting itself from criticism. This provision is of more concern given the strongly criticized court practice, formed after the 2010 RA Civil Code amendments to legislation on libel and insult;
- Regardless of whether these provisions are implemented, the existence of such restrictions in the Procedure is already an instrument of pressure and may unduly curtail the activities of journalists, especially during the elections – a vital period for the country.

Proceeding from the aforesaid, we, the signatories, demand the RA CEC to revise the reasons for denial or termination of accreditation, set forth by Articles 9 and 11 of the Procedure of Journalists' Accreditation at the RA CEC.

Yerevan Press Club
Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression
Internews Media Support NGO
"Asparez" Journalists Club
Media Diversity Institute-Armenia

