

Statement Regarding the RA Ministry of Justice initiative of compulsory registration of media

1 July, 2019, Yerevan

On 28 June 2019, a package of amendments to the Law On the Dissemination of Mass Information and two other RA laws foreseeing a procedure of registration for mass media outlets in Armenia was introduced in the Government website e-draft.am for discussion. This initiative is regressive in its approach and violates the conceptual principles underlying the reform of the laws regulating the media sector.

As early as the beginning of 2000s, the media community made a painstaking effort to prevent the institute of registration of the media outlets from being regulated by law in the light of its restrictive role for the right to freedom of expression and for serving as a tool for discriminating against the media in the hands of the authorities. The previous years have demonstrated that the law adopted in 2003 was progressive in its nature and that the development of the sector must not be conditioned on the registration of the media outlets. Moreover, abandoning the institute of registration is believed to be one of the strongest sides of the legislation governing the Armenian media activity also by the international structures and the return to the institute of registration will undoubtedly be assessed as regressive by them as well.

The proposed package of drafts is unacceptable also due to the fact that the professional circles are currently in the midst of discussions around approximating the concept of the media to the current realities with a view to adding more clarity to the legal relations stemming from it and amending the Law On the Dissemination of Mass Information as necessary. Pulling this single issue of the sector regulation out of the context of this process is an extremely ineffective and obstructive enterprise.

We, the undersigned media organisations, note the assurances offered by the Ministry of Justice that was the author of these drafts to the effect that the aim of registration is to render the database of the State Registry free for the media and the circulation of the drafts via e-draft.am – the first step in stimulating broad discussions on them. Nevertheless, we have to remind the Government that participation of the public, including independent experts in the process of adoption of important decisions, implies their involvement much earlier, starting from the stage of exchange of ideas and opinions and development of the drafts.

Taking account of the aforementioned, we demand:

That the provisions envisaging registration of the media outlets be removed from the package of amendments and not be attached to the provision of free information to journalists from the State Registry;

To make all legislative initiatives and ideas concerning the activities of the media and the information sector first subject to expert discussion followed by joint work of the media community and civil society over these drafts.

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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