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Freedom of the press and the working conditions of journalists in conflict zones

Recommendation 1702 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 945th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (9 November 2005)

1. The Committee of Ministers welcomes Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1702 (2005) and Resolution 1438 (2005) on freedom of the press and the working conditions of journalists in conflict zones, which it has transmitted to the member states' governments. The two documents are timely and provide a much-needed response to a situation in which, on the one hand, the media and more particularly journalists encounter more and more obstacles and restraints in the performance of their professional duties which are of crucial importance in exercising the right to information and, on the other, face dangerous conditions which imperil seriously their life, liberty and security. Concerning more generally Resolution 1438 (2005), the Committee of Ministers welcomes the fact that the Assembly notes the pertinence of the Committee of Ministers' Declaration and Recommendation No. R (96) 4 on the protection of journalists in situations of conflict and tension.

2. The Committee of Ministers follows closely the situation in member states with respect to freedom of expression and information in the media and the working conditions of journalists in situations of conflict. It recalls that such issues were examined in-depth in 2004 in the context of its thematic monitoring of compliance with commitments accepted by member states of the Council of Europe and that a number of follow-up activities have been undertaken. It draws the Parliamentary Assembly's attention in particular to the work undertaken by the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC) and its Group of Specialists on freedom of expression and information in times of crisis (MC-S-IC), pursuant to the Action Plan adopted at the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy (Kyiv, 10 and 11 March 2005). In particular, the MC-S-IC is entrusted with exploring the methods to monitor the implementation by member states of the texts adopted by the Council of Europe on freedom of expression and information in times of crisis.¹

3. The MC-S-IC is examining whether, taking into account the texts which are under consideration or already exist at the international level concerning freedom of expression and information in times of crisis, European standards should be set out so as to guarantee this freedom. If necessary, the MC-S-IC will develop such standards for subsequent consideration by the CDMC and submission to the Committee of Ministers. Approaching the protection of all media professionals in its broader perspective, the MC-S-IC will examine whether measures should be taken to ensure the free movement of media professionals covering crisis situations and will establish a forum for regular review, in consultation with media professionals and other interested parties, of the rights and responsibilities of the media and of the working conditions of journalists in times of crisis. The MC-S-IC will take due account of the Parliamentary Assembly's Recommendation and Resolution in the context of its work.

¹ Committee of Ministers' Declaration and Recommendation No. R (96) 4 on the Protection of Journalists in situations of conflict and tension, adopted on 3 May 1996 at its 98th Session.

4. As regards co-operation with other international organisations on questions relating to the freedom of the press and the working conditions of journalists in conflict zones, the Committee of Ministers agrees with the Assembly about the importance of such co-operation. The Council of Europe has been working in particular together with the OSCE in this field. The Committee of Ministers has held exchanges of views with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in 2001 and in 2004. Moreover, the CDMC is open to co-operation with relevant bodies of other international organisations on these issues. As appropriate, representatives of such bodies may be invited to participate in CDMC meetings and in meetings of its groups of specialists. As regards co-operation with non-governmental organisations (points 6 and 14 of Assembly Resolution 1438 (2005)), the Committee of Ministers underlines that Reporters Without Borders already enjoys observer status with the MC-S-IC. In addition, contacts are maintained with a number of other organisations.