

AEJ Media Freedom Representative's Report for the Ordu Congress 2010

By William Horsley, AEJ Media Freedom Representative

AEJ campaigns – letters, website etc

In the past year the AEJ MFR has issued several statements in defence of media freedom:

Belarus: A letter of support for the Belarus Association of Journalists (BJA) was sent, protesting against government failure to carry out credible investigation into the suspicious death of journalist Aleh Byabenin. The AEJ earlier sent letters of support to the BJA concerning deplorable and severe restrictions on media independence.

Israel: Israel was called on to honour press freedom standards after journalists aboard the aid flotilla bound for Gaza were detained incommunicado and stopped from reporting for some days after the seizure of the ships.

Pakistan: A message was sent as requested by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists to support our journalist colleagues there who have protested against violence, harassment and the misuse of anti-terrorism laws and other state powers to limit free expression and legitimate media scrutiny of public affairs.

Romania: A statement of concern that a proposed Romanian law on public broadcasting would be damaging to standards of editorial independence was issued.

Ukraine: Two special reports by our new Ukrainian Section colleagues exposing serious violations by political and business forces of legitimate MF standards were posted on the website in the past year (see [Survey](#))

AEJ and World Press Freedom Day

In all, 15 AEJ sections staged or joined public debates, rallies or other events marking World Press Freedom Day on or around 3 May 2010. Common themes included protection from violence and abuses of state power, the importance of laws to protect journalists' confidential sources, the damaging impact of anti-terrorism laws and the threat to media independence and professionalism from commercial pressures in the age of internet.

The UK Section was involved in the first ever observance of a minute's silence in honour of journalists killed for their work around the world. It took place in the BBC during a WPF Day event on 4 May. The AEJ urges all sections to take steps to persuade leading news organisations everywhere to observe a minute's silence regularly in future years, as a focus for public attention on the alarming increase in murders and attacks on journalists in many countries.

In the past year, the AEJ has contributed directly to new initiatives by the Council of Europe to reverse the erosion of media freedom and freedom of expression across Europe. The AEJ can now influence European standards and laws to protect the safety and independence of journalists. In particular:

Council of Europe new media freedom database

The AEJ worked with the Council of Europe on the plan now agreed to set up a real-time online database of serious violations of legitimate media freedom. AEJ sections are invited to send in reports on authoritative and specific MF violations for inclusion in the database.

The Ordu Congress was due to discuss the AEJ's future input and contribution. The MFR would advise all sections when more details are known about how the database will work. It will be based on the CoE's 27 [Indicators of Media in a Democracy](#).

Council of Europe guidelines on reviewing anti-terrorism laws to conform with media freedom standards

The AEJ successfully tabled the amendment that led to European governments committing themselves in 2009 to regular reviews of their anti-terrorism laws and practices. On behalf of the AEJ, the MFR signed the Reykjavik Forum appeal by 40 leading NGOs and legal experts, calling for better protection for free expression and free media in anti-terrorism laws, during the Council of Europe Ministerial Conference in May 2009.

Sections and members can use relevant CoE texts as a source of detailed information on this "hot" topic. They may also contribute directly to the CoE's ongoing debate on how to make the review system effective: please [contact me](#) for details.

The aim of those reviews is to put a stop to laws and police behaviour which impede journalists from doing their proper work of scrutinising governments and all aspects of public life according to article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights

AEJ and the Council of Europe Media Steering Committee (CDMC)

The AEJ has used its observer status on this [CoE Committee](#) to influence Europe-wide guidelines also on:

Internet – issues of enhancing public service value, censorship and privacy

Protection of whistle-blowers

Public service media governance standards

Wider stakeholder participation in the Media Steering Committee's work (public hearings etc)

Multiple links with the Council of Europe on media freedom and defence of independent journalism

- The MFR and Zdenko Duka (Croatia) took part by invitation in CoE events as part of the CoE's Campaign against Discrimination in the Media during 2009.
- The MFR talked to judges and officials of the European Court of Human Rights at a seminar on journalists' concerns about article 10 media freedom cases and the Court's media relations policies on 1 October 2010.

The MFR was due to brief the CoE's Commissioner on Human Rights in late November 2010 on AEJ concerns and priorities in the MF area, and make recommendations for the future work of the HR Commissioner, by invitation.

Conclusion

The AEJ regained its observer status in the Council of Europe in 2007. Since then the MFR has been active in the CDMC, arguing forcefully for measures to uphold media independence and freedom from many threats, above all the misuse of state power. Since 2007, the AEJ has also had a significant impact through the series of Media Freedom Surveys and other activities.

I hope that many sections and members will take part in these various attempts to protect media freedom under threat through the CoE and other international organisations – especially the CoE database and related campaigns which will start early in 2011.

We can make a difference!