



PACE rapporteur concerned about the Russian State Duma initiative to shut down media for defamatory reports

Strasbourg, 29.04.2008 - Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) rapporteur on media freedom, Andrew McIntosh (United Kingdom, SOC), today expressed concern at a legislative initiative adopted last Friday by the Russian State Duma.

"This revision of the Russian media law will allow courts to impose more severe criminal sanctions against media which report negatively on high state officials. Media outlets could even be closed. The current media law in Russia is already very severe in penalising defamation of the President, Prime Minister and other senior state officials. An increase in penalties would risk violating the requirement of proportionality under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In contrast, the recent PACE Resolution 1577 and Recommendation 1814 (2007) called on member states to work towards the decriminalisation of defamation," Mr McIntosh said.

"When I was government minister for the media in the United Kingdom, members of government were advised not to respond to defamatory or false negative statements of facts in the media – and the British press is sometimes quite rough. Any reaction would encourage additional media attention to the matter. Opinion polls carried out a few years ago showed that only 7% of Russians trust the mass media anyway," he added.

"Instead of new legislation, I recommend that media self-regulation should be strengthened in Russia. If the media themselves judge the truth and fairness of media reports, professional media ethics and public trust in the media will be strengthened, while freedom of expression will be respected", Mr McIntosh concluded.

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