

Press Release

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Civil society conference calls on Council of Europe, EU and OSCE to support setting up of European Monitoring Council on Media in Belarus

Strasbourg, 09.06.2008 – A Council of Europe conference on the media situation in Belarus has concluded that there is no improvement in the field of media and freedom of expression in Belarus. The policy of the Belarusian authorities towards independent media remains consistently severe, using the police and legal system to persecute journalists.

The conference, which took place in Warsaw, Poland on 6 and 7 June, called for the establishment of a European Monitoring Council on Media in Belarus, inviting representatives of different European bodies including the European Parliament and OSCE to participate as honorary members. The Council would also include experts from international non-governmental organisations and would monitor the situation on media and freedom of expression in Belarus and react in cases of violations.

The conference participants also called on the Belarusian authorities to:

- decriminalise national media legislation;
- stop administrative persecution of journalists who cover mass demonstrations, especially during the electoral process;
- ensure full and free access of all media to the information regarding the pre-election process and the holding of elections themselves;
- return immediately belongings confiscated during searches of journalists' homes;
- discuss with a full range of media organisations all of its new media law initiatives, in particular the announced regulation of the Internet.

The event, which was organised by the Council of Europe Conference of International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, brought together members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), international NGOs, Belarusian journalists, human rights defenders, representatives of the democratic opposition in Belarus, as well as representatives of NGOs, experts and politicians from Poland.

The event is a part of a wider effort of the Council of Europe to support democratic NGOs and independent media in Belarus, and was warmly welcomed by the Swedish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which confirmed that democratic development in Belarus is a concern for Europe and a priority during its chairmanship.

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