

## ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

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### A. OVERVIEW

The OSCE is an international organisation consisting of 56 states from Europe, Central Asia and North America. It deals with a wide range of security-related and economic development issues including the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It provides a forum for political negotiations and decision-making in its working areas.

The institutional structure of the OSCE comprises the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

### B. OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

<http://www.osce.org/odihr>

According to the information contained on the institution's website, the Office is active in the fields of election observation, democratic development, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rule of law.

In 2007, the Office established a **Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions** to monitor their situation and promote and protect their interests. This activity is carried out in co-operation with international organisations and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Council of Europe, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Secretary General's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, the NGOs, Frontline and the International Federation for Human Rights, etc.) One of the aims is to strengthen the relationship between governmental and non-governmental human rights organisations and to support the establishment of networks of human rights defenders which may also address individual cases.

<http://www.osce.org/odihr/44936>

#### ❖ Documentation:

*Human Rights Defenders in the OSCE Region: Challenges and Good Practices (April 2007 – April 2008)*

[http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr\\_search/35652](http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr_search/35652)

This report identifies challenges and good practices with regard to the protection of human rights defenders (including journalists).

It reports various incidents of human rights violations that affect human rights defenders. Relying on various sources (i.e. international organisations, NGOs, the work of its own office (the Office for democratic institutions and human rights), the report addresses various areas of concern, such as: abduction, arbitrary detention, threats, harassment and intimidation, retaliation against family members, prison sentences, arrests and fines, restrictions on travel, deregistration of their organisations, expulsion, attacks on offices, etc.

Using comparative examples and the communications with member states, the report identifies good practices that deal with the above challenges.

The report devotes half of its content to the collection of various materials which are appended to its text, such as: a compilation of relevant OSCE commitments, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities, the indicators identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to assess compliance with the UN Declaration on human rights defenders, the questionnaire of OSCE/the Office for democratic institutions and human rights on human rights defenders in the OSCE region in 2008.

### **C. THE OSCE REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA**

<http://www.osce.org/fom/>

It observes media developments in the member states and issues early warning on violations of freedom of expression. It also assists states in complying with the OSCE principles regarding freedom of expression and free media.

E.g. It can provide technical expert (with experience in forensic science and medicine) to assist in the investigation process.<sup>1</sup>

It publishes various documents: annual reports, articles, press statements that address partially or exclusively the issue of the safety of journalists

#### **Documentation:**

*Yearbook 11 (2009)*  
(published in 2010)

<http://www.osce.org/fom/documents?page=3>  
[http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr\\_search/41732](http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr_search/41732)

It gives an overview of the safety issue and the implications of impunity (as has also been reported/repeated in the reports of previous years). It makes references to the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and the work of the UN Human Rights Council. It also reports incidences of violence against journalists and

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release: OSCE expert report on the authorities' investigation of journalist's death.(23.10.2010), <http://www.osce.org/sg/74196>

insufficiencies in the response of the domestic legal systems, some of which were raised in the communications with member states. Some of these communications are also in the form of press releases.

See similarly:

*Report to the Permanent Council by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media* (published on 16 December 2010)

[http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr\\_search/74598](http://www.osce.org/search/apachesolr_search/74598)

#### **Press releases:**

‘OSCE media freedom representative welcomes Russian journalists’ initiative to tackle violence against the press’ (06.05.2009).

<http://www.osce.org/fom/50882>

‘OSCE media freedom representative calls for end to crackdown on independent media in Belarus’ (05.01.2011).

<http://www.osce.org/fom/74852>

‘Continued concern about investigation of missing Ukrainian journalist’ (08.02.2011).

<http://www.osce.org/fom/53283>

‘OSCE Chairman shocked by murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya’ (07.10.2006)

<http://www.osce.org/cio/47725>

‘OSCE media freedom representative strongly condemns attack on B92 and its journalists’ (16.02.2011).

<http://www.osce.org/fom/75630>

‘OSCE media freedom representative appalled by murder of Turkish journalist Hrant Dink’ (19.01.2007).

<http://www.osce.org/fom/48142>

‘OSCE media freedom representative urges Turkey to stop prosecution of author, reform laws that restrict speech rights’ (18.06.2009)

<http://www.osce.org/fom/51059>

‘OSCE media freedom representative calls for thorough and independent investigation into death of opposition website director in Belarus’ (06.09.2010)

<http://www.osce.org/fom/72217>

‘OSCE Mission to Serbia welcomes government determination to prosecute death threats against investigative journalist’ (23.04.2010)

<http://www.osce.org/serbia/69190>

‘OSCE media freedom representative condemns arrest of journalists covering protest at U.S. military base’ (23.11.2010)

<http://www.osce.org/fom/74197>

‘OSCE media freedom representative reiterates call for end to harassment of the media in Belarus, regrets authorities’ failure to facilitate timely visit’ (01.02.2011)

<http://www.osce.org/fom/75277>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The OSCE offers an intergovernmental and yet independent framework that brings together media workers, specialists, civil society groups and governmental representatives to address various issues relating to the protection of journalists. It identifies particular problems and proposes solutions drawing on comparative examples and communications with governments. Although its mechanism is not legally binding, it provides an institutional alternative to the existing international human rights law systems.