

Paris, 20 February 2008

Dear Mr. First Deputy Prime Minister,

Reporters Without Borders, an international press freedom organisation that won the Sakharov prize in 2005, would like to discuss certain aspects of the speech you gave to the Krasnoyarsk Economic Forum on 15 February.

In your speech you said: “Freedom is better than lack of freedom – this principle should be at the core of our politics.”

We welcome this position and we urge you to take concrete steps to create the conditions for greater freedom in Russia. Our annual report, published on 13 February, has a chapter about the situation in Russia. It describes the main press freedom violations that have been committed there and lays out our concerns for the future.

We would like to put four proposals to you for improving the situation in Russia, which was ranked 144th out of 169 countries in the 2007 Reporters Without Borders annual world press freedom index.

The first would be to amend the legislation on defamation, insulting comments and insulting a government representative. Articles 129, 130 and 319 of the criminal code should be repealed. According to the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations, legal proceedings have been brought against journalists under these provisions more than 300 times.

Next, the anti-extremism law promulgated in July 2007 must be amended. Its vague wording exposes NGOs and independent news websites to prosecution. You said in your speech that you read the online press every day and you claimed that online publications enjoy a great deal of freedom.


However, there have been many cases of journalists being the victims of reprisals for articles they had posted on the Internet. Such is the case of Andrey Novikov, who was unjustly held in a psychiatric clinic for 10 months. And although Internet availability is gaining pace, according to the technology and communications ministry’s figures, only 24 per cent of Russians currently have online access. Television continues to be the population’s main source of news.

This is why there is an urgent need – and this is our third proposal – to remedy the lack of diversity in broadcasting. Conditions must be created for the emergence of privately-owned national TV stations that are independent of any control by state-owned or parastatal companies.

Finally, you must undertake to combat the impunity enjoyed by those who murder journalists. In this, there are two cases about which we feel especially strongly, those of Anna Politkovskaya and Paul Klebnikov, murdered in Moscow on 7 October 2006 and 9 July 2004 respectively. The judicial system has not given proof of its independence and determination to bring the people responsible for these two murders to trial. We would like to see significant progress in these two cases this year.

We trust you will give this matter your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Ménard', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Robert Ménard
Secretary-General