PETITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP AND POLITICAL PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS IN SLOVENIA

Slovenian journalists accuse Prime Minister Janez Janša of restricting media freedom.

After the 2004 elections, the centre-right government began trading in state shares in major Slovenian companies that were co-owners of the media. By changing the capital structure, it made it possible to replace the majority of CEOs, members of supervisory boards and editors of most of the Slovenian mainstream media. By doing so, the government established an informal and influential decision-making pyramid in the media. The new directors and editors do not respect journalistic autonomy and censor journalistic content that is critical of the authorities.

The interference of the government and the ruling SDS party in the media was acknowledged in a letter on 12 June 2007 by former State Secretary at the Ministry of the Economy Andrijana Starina Kosem.

With the help of the parliamentary majority, the ruling coalition also adopted a new act on the Slovenian national radio and television, RTV Slovenija, which in practice strengthened the control of the governing structures over the public radio and television service.

Censorship in the Slovenian media has several forms. The first refers to content corrections of articles without the author's consent. Second, commissioned articles are also often not published, usually without a sound explanation. The third form is to restrict reporting on certain politically sensitive topics and to deny access to certain media outlets to opinion leaders that are not liked by the government. Journalists see their employment terminated, are degraded, denied the right to report on individual cases, are subject to transfers, discrimination and harassment.

The protest is also joined by journalists in the media that are not under the influence of the government, reporters who write for foreign media, and those who have left the journalistic profession due to unbearable pressures, retired or sought employment in other media.

A letter dealing with censorship and government pressure on journalists has already been received by presidents, parliaments and governments of all the Member States of the European Union, many non-governmental organisations and media institutions around the world.

On 1 January 2008, Slovenia will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. What will be the message to the citizens of the European Union if it is presided over by a country where pressures on journalists are increasingly self-evident and where authoritarian rule is being strengthened at the expense of democracy and media freedom? The presidency of such a country may be a worrying sign for the present, and even more so for the future of the European Union.

Ljubljana, 10 September 2007