

Open letter at the beginning of Slovenian presidency of the European Union

The Petition against censorship and political pressures on journalists in Slovenia was signed by 571 journalists in autumn 2007 as an expression of protest against interference of politics in the media. But media freedom in Slovenia remains restricted.

During the parliamentary discussion preceding the confidence vote on November 19, Prime Minister Janez Jansa mostly assessed the media. He presented the petition as a conspiracy and accused the signatories as "exporters of lies" and as people blemishing Slovenia abroad.

The deputies of the ruling coalition rejected the demand for founding an independent committee which would investigate the allegations on restriction of media freedom during the session of the competent parliamentary committee on December 11. The initiators of the petition were not even invited to the session.

In the meantime the Radio and Television Act, passed in 2005, has essentially degraded public radio and television. The leading positions have been occupied by pro-government oriented but mostly incompetent people. Consequently many well-known journalists have left these institutions, and violations of basic premises of journalist profession are on the increase.

A few weeks after the publication of the petition, a dispute between the government and a media owner who had enabled governmental control over two media houses broke out. The representative of the owner publicly confessed that the Prime Minister had decided about the members of the supervisory board, the chief of executive office and the editor in chief of the biggest daily newspaper in the country.

Although three months have passed since the publication of the petition, the Slovenian government and the National Assembly have not met the demands of the international journalist organisations - the International Press Institute (IPI), Journalists Without Borders (RSF) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) - to carry out an independent inquiry into the allegations of the petition. The latest attempts of influence on one of the weekly magazines further supports the need for such inquiry.

We therefore ask you to contribute, within your competence, to the implementation of this demand, because an independent inquiry by international experts can provide valuable support to the assessment of the current situation and improve media freedom in Slovenia.

The European Union is presided by a country in which 571 signatories have issued a warning against censorship and political pressures, but its government and parliament still reject any dialogue with the journalists.

The initiators of the petition:

Blaž Zgaga
Matej Šurc

31 December 2007