

Information Note

on the actions by the Armenian authorities following the events of 29 July 2016

Ensuring safety of journalists is one of the fundamental components of democratic governance and the Armenian authorities are determined to fully respect their commitments in this regard. We would like to emphasize that the Armenian authorities invested significant efforts towards strengthening the capacities of the law enforcement bodies to respect the fundamental rights in public order management during mass events, rallies and demonstrations. We appreciate the cooperation with the Council of Europe, OSCE and other international organisations on this matter. We will continue this work with the aim of ensuring full respect of human rights standards within the law enforcement bodies in Armenia.

In late July 2016, Armenia was challenged with dangerous situation of armed seizure of a police station in Yerevan and hostage taking, which resulted in three killed police officers and a number of wounded policemen and civilians. Moreover, there were cases of incitement to violence in support of those who seized the police station, as well as calls for unlawful actions against the public order, which prompted police to undertake measures aimed at preventing further escalation of the situation. Unfortunately, a number of journalists were also affected during the police operation, which took place on July 29.

Immediately after the events, on July 30, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Armenia based on the evidences provided by the media representatives launched criminal investigation to look into the cases of violence and brutality against journalists in Yerevan in the night of July 29-30 (in Armenian, <http://prosecutor.am/am/news/6520/>). At the same time the Chief of the Police has initiated an internal investigation to pinpoint the transgressions by the police officers.

Based on the reports of alleged use of force against journalists who were performing their professional duties and were covering the events the Special Investigation Service initiated criminal cases under Articles 164 (hindrance to the legal professional activities of a journalist), 185 (willful destruction or spoilage of property), 258 (hooliganism committed by a group of persons or organized group), 308 (abuse of official authority) and 309 (exceeding official authorities) of the Criminal Code of Armenia. The issue of reimbursement for the damaged equipment is also under the attention of the investigative bodies.

As a result of the investigation charges were brought against 8 persons. In relation to 7 persons the cases have been already sent to court, which in 4 cases handed out a sentence of one-year term imprisonment and a fine. In one case the court ordered to pay a fine.

At the same time, it should be noted that the investigation revealed that on July 29 no police officer was engaged in the actions directed against journalists. Nevertheless, on August 8, 2016, Vladimir Gasparyan, Head of the Police of the Republic of Armenia, signed a decree dismissing Ashot Karapetyan, Chief of the Police Department of Yerevan, while 18 other police officers were subjected to various disciplinary penalties.

(<http://armenpress.am/eng/news/856417/ashot-karapetyan-dismissed-from-post-of-head-of-yerevan-city-department-of-police.html>)

Following the July events, the President of Armenia in his address publicly apologized to the journalists. He said, in particular: "I thank our journalists and reporters for their dedicated work and for working for a bloodless resolution of the situation. I also apologize to the journalists for the events which took place on the night of July 30; during these events it was our greatest blunder. Certainly, conclusions will be made. I ask for our indulgence, I ask journalists but not the law enforcement personnel to forget about these events, because I am confident that it will never happen again. I also want these events not to have, even subconsciously, an impact on the freedom of your work," President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan, August 1, 2016/

<http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2016/08/01/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-meeting-with-government-civil-and-spiritual-representatives/>

The President of Armenia also assured that a thorough investigation of the incident will take place to locate the instigators of the clashes, which will be followed by an open trial. Needless to say, that such assurances coming from the highest level of the Armenian authorities are an important reaffirmation for the unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety of journalists.