European Commission: Joint Communication on European Neighbourhood Policy

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On 20 March 2013, the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published a joint communication on European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP was revised in 2011 in order to "provide more support for partner countries building deep and sustainable democracy". The Joint Communication is accompanied by twelve national reports on neighbouring countries in the southern Mediterranean area (Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt) and to the east (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

The Communication notes that "insufficient progress" has been made on implementation of the recommendations on freedom of expression, the press, and the media since the revision of the ENP. The media suffer from "political and economic interference, a lack of diversity and self-censorship".

The Commission and the High Representative are calling on the various partner countries to make more effort in the media field:

- Armenia should ensure greater independence and diversity in the media, and restrict the conditions for withdrawing broadcasting licences;

- In Azerbaijan, freedom of expression and the media remains a subject for concern: journalists are being intimidated and threatened, and the bill on defamation has still not been submitted to the national Parliament.

- In Egypt, considerable progress has been noted since the change of government, although a number of cases of interference have been reported.

- In Georgia, access to the media has improved (must-carry/must-offer rules), but there is still political interference.

- The exercise of freedom of expression and the media remains "problematic" in Palestine; numerous violations of the freedom of on-line media have also been noted.

- Restrictions on the freedom of the media and the press at the time of revising legislation on the press have given rise to concern in Jordan.

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- The report on the Lebanon establishes that the media environment is relatively liberal and that freedom of expression is observed, despite a number of isolated incidences of intimidation and censorship. A bill on regulating on-line media was withdrawn after attracting much criticism. On audiovisual policy, the report indicates that the national audiovisual council (Conseil National de l'Audiovisuel) remains a purely consultative authority, and that decisions on granting licences are made by the Council of Ministers.

- In Morocco, hindrances to freedom of expression and of the media have been reported (including intimidation and violence directed at journalists). The report nevertheless notes the emergence of a "public debate on government action", largely thanks to television broadcasts.

- The report on Moldova notes progress in legislation, with the adoption and implementation of legislation on freedom of expression. There has, however, been no progress with the reform of the Broadcasting Code and public-service broadcasting.

- In Tunisia, a certain number of initiatives with a view to establishing the independence of the media have been reported, although a number of outbreaks of violence on the part of extremist groups are endangering the progress made with freedom of expression.

- Ukraine has not implemented most of the recommendations made in 2012. It is invited to adopt clear rules on access to the media for election candidates. The report also notes a lack of progress in the adoption of a bill on public-service broadcasting and transparency of ownership in the media.

The Commission and the High Representative wish to reinforce their collaboration with the players in civil society, the national parliaments, the social partners and businesses in order to achieve the objectives of the reforms determined with the ENP countries. The partnership also takes the form of economic aid. The Communication concludes that the European Union "will increasingly need to differentiate its policy response, in line with the different developments, ambitions and needs of its partners".

Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: "European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership", 20 March 2013

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/docs/2013_enp_pack/2013_comm_conjoint_en.pdf

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