

**Intervention of H.E. the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus,
Mr Neoclis Sylikiotis at the First European Ministerial Conference
for Media and New Communication Services, 28-29 May 2009**

Sub –Theme 2: Trust in Media Trust in Content

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank our hosts, the Government of Iceland, and in particular the Ministry of Culture, first, for giving us the opportunity to meet in the beautiful city of Reykjavik and, second, for organising so efficiently this First European Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and New Communication Services.

At the same time I would like to extend our thanks to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the management and staff of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs for doing such an excellent preparatory work for this Conference and for implementing most of the goals of the Kiev Action Plan. We are highly appreciative of the mission of the Council of Europe in upholding the fundamental freedoms of the European citizen and, for this reason, we participate actively in most of its subordinate bodies which are doing a great job in keeping Europe free and democratic.

We are living through difficult times and things are expected to get even tougher. The 21st century has not started, unfortunately, in the best of terms and a string of events threatens the fundamental freedoms of many citizens

throughout the world. 9-11, the epidemics and the ongoing financial crisis have marked in a very negative manner the first decade of the 21st century.

These events have also created a certain political climate where the citizen, feeling increasingly threatened and insecure, seems to be more ready than ever to surrender part of his freedom to the state and international organisations for his security, health and welfare. This very worrying condition has permeated quickly through to affect the media and first and foremost the established mainstream media – television, radio and the press and has, consequently eroded people's trust, especially in mainstream media.

Certain states have used the threat of terrorism as a pretext to impose severe restrictions in the freedom of expression and information of their journalists and citizens by, *inter alia*, by curtailing some of the activities of journalists and by introducing “big brother” surveillance in the daily life of ordinary citizens for the sake of enhancing security.

This worrying trend is documented in two recent (2007) Surveys of Media Freedom published by the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) which found disturbing evidence that freedom and independence of the media are in their words “*under assault and in retreat across much of Europe – including many cases of violence against journalists, censorship and self-censorship, oppressive laws, harassment and prosecution of journalists and undue political and commercial pressures*”.

All these developments have, inevitably, led to a noticeable reduction in public trust in the media and its content. Recent surveys by AEJ and others

also document a considerable decrease people's trust in media and their contents, and attribute this phenomenon to a widely held perception that European media, especially but not exclusively private ones, are guilty of two different sins. The first of these sins is the trivialisation, or lack of seriousness of news content, including an uncritical obsession with celebrity, which could, at best, be considered as misuse of media freedom or, at worse, be seen as an intentional diversion of the attention of the citizen away from the real news. And the second is the systematic political bias or lack of balance on certain key issues, which can be described either as surrender of proper independence, or, at best, as a curtailment of that independence, depending on whether the bias is seen as voluntary or forced.

All these worrying facts underline the need for urgent and coordinated action and here we find that the role and mission of the Council of Europe as a "watchdog" and a guarantor of freedom of expression and information acquire even greater significance. Cyprus is ready to contribute in this noble effort and the first step can be taken by us, here in this Conference of decision-makers of Europe, to equip the Council of Europe with all the necessary legal instruments and funds in order to face the great challenge, face the coming onslaught on our personal freedoms.

At this point I close my intervention thanking once again both hosts and organisers for giving us this great opportunity to take some positive action in defence of freedom and democracy in our Continent and in the world.

Thank you.