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European Union Must Keep Human Rights at the Core of its Eastern Partnership

Following the launch of the European Union (EU)'s Eastern Partnership on 7 May, ARTICLE 19 calls on the EU to keep protection for human rights and freedom of expression at the heart of the Eastern Partnership and its dialogue with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

On 5 May, ARTICLE 19 set out its freedom of expression concerns with regards to each proposed member of the partnership in a letter to the European Union Presidency (www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/europe-eastern-partnership.pdf).

In the letter, ARTICLE 19 calls the attention of the EU and the members of the Partnership to the recurrence of murders, disappearances, and assaults of journalists in all Partnership Countries, the continued impunity for the perpetrators, and the climate of fear within the media. Other grave concerns include police brutality, the imprisonment of journalists, and the inadequate legal and policy frameworks in all six countries, in contravention of international standards.

Some of the cases highlighted in the letter include:

- In Armenia, investigative journalists Edik Baghdasaryan and Lusine Barseghyan, were both physically assaulted, and Levon Barseghyan's car was set on fire. The latest incident, on 30 April 2009, left Argishti Kivirian, an internet journalist, severely injured in hospital. Journalist Arman Babadzhanian remains imprisoned since 2006.
- In Azerbaijan, the 2005 murder of Elmar Huseynov, the editor-in-chief of *the Monitor*, remains unresolved. In 2008 alone, there were at least 49 incidents involving verbal or physical assaults on journalists. In a recent attack, *ANS TV* correspondents Nijat Suleymanov, Elmin Muradov and Azer Balayev reported that they were subjected to ill-treatment by police on 26 April 2009 whilst trying to investigate the destruction of a building. Journalists Eynulla Fatullayev, Ganimat Zahidov and Novruzali Mamedov continue to be imprisoned.
- In Belarus, the authorities have failed to shed light on the July 2000 'disappearance' of cameraman Dmitri Zavadski and the October 2004 murder of the journalist Veranica Charkasava. The latest attacks on journalists include an assault on photographer Uladzimir Hrydzin on 16 April 2009 and the detention and confiscation of equipment of journalist Siarhei Panamarou and his crew on 17 April of this year.
- In Georgia peaceful protesters have been physically attacked on a daily basis since the beginning on 9 April 2009 of ongoing anti-government protests. Opposition activists

have reportedly been specifically targeted, as police allegedly turned a blind eye. Throughout the two elections in 2008 and the August 2008 conflict with Russia, the government suppressed the media through a number of tactics, including the takeover of the television station *Imedi*. A government supporter attacked *Hereti Radio* correspondent Khatuna Gogishvili on the day of the election and threatened to kill her. During the August 2008 armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in South Ossetia three journalists were killed and at least 10 journalists were wounded.

- In Moldova, Alina Radu, Anastasia Nani, Tatiana Ețco and Nicolae Cușchevici from national newspaper *Ziarul de Garda*, *PRO TV Chisinau* cameraman Constantin Rogodantiev and cameraman Oleg Brega, were all ill-treated by police on 8 April 2009 whilst covering the post-election demonstrations. A significant number of protesters, who were detained, were subjected to ill-treatment by the police, some of which was severe. Media and non-governmental organisation's who critically reported on the events came under government pressure.
- In Ukraine the instigators of the murder of internet journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 1999 have still not been brought to justice. The attack on Natalya Vasova, director of *Rezonans-TV*, three years ago, has still not been resolved. In February 2009 a group of journalists from the Dnepropetrovsk journalistic investigations studio *Rezonans-TV* were assaulted by a security guard.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the EU and the Partnership Countries to promptly and independently investigate and prosecute those responsible for the murders of, and violence against, journalists, as well as for assaults against peaceful demonstrators. Impunity should not be allowed to flourish and a clear message must be sent that attacks on the media of any kind will not be tolerated.

ARTICLE 19 also calls for the reforms and amendments to all legislation which hinders freedom of expression and information, so as to bring them into line with international human rights standards.

“For the Eastern Partnership Initiative to deliver on its promises and strengthen the existence of an enlarged democratic space in the region, the European Union must strongly reaffirm and demonstrate that human rights protection should be at the centre of the dialogue and initiative. Any progresses within this scheme must be determined by a genuine commitment to, and real improvement in, the protection of human rights and free expression.” says Dr. Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The European Union's Eastern Partnership is a new initiative, launched by the European Union on 7 May 2009 in Prague, which aims at developing closer and multilateral relationship between the EU and its Eastern partners, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It will focus on improving political and economic relations through four thematic platforms: democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance.
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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.