

Lawsuit against Hungarian journalist can have chilling effect on Internet freedom, warns OSCE media freedom representative



OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović addressing media at the first OSCE South East Europe Media Conference, Sarajevo, 14 October 2011. (OSCE/V. Pribilović)

VIENNA, 12 September 2012 – Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, today warned that the lawsuit initiated by the official Hungarian News Agency against journalist György Balavany can constrain media pluralism in the Internet.

“I am concerned that the Hungarian News Agency filed a lawsuit against the journalist simply because he published critical blogs,” *Mijatović* said. “Freedom of expression is an essential element of any democracy, and it is not limited to statements acceptable to all.”

Balavany, a journalist with the political weekly HVG and a blogger, posted two blogs on his personal website on 23 July and 14 August, claiming that public service media use taxpayers’ money to misinform the public. The Hungarian News Agency (MTI) says its reputation and commercial interests were damaged by the blogs, and demands from the journalist ten million Hungarian Forints (approximately 36,000 euro) in damages, a public apology and the removal of the blogs.

“Media have a duty to draw attention to issues of public interest. This is what the countries have accepted as their OSCE commitments on free expression, this is an internationally accepted standard on free expression and is the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights,” *Mijatović* said.

“A lawsuit for expressing critical views on the Internet can cause chilling effect on media in Hungary,” she said.

“Following recent changes in the Hungarian media legislation, today the Internet is the main forum where pluralistic debates and discourse can still take place. Weakening of the blogosphere would further deteriorate free expression in the country.”

Since June 2010 *Mijatović* has repeatedly called for the reform of Hungary’s media legislation.