

Dear Mr Churov,

I am writing to express the deep concern of the Association of European Journalists, an independent organisation of journalists active in more than twenty countries, over the overwhelming evidence of systematic media bias in favour of the ruling political forces in the current campaign for elections to the Russian State Duma.

We note the stark finding of the Russian Union of Journalists' analytical section, the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, that over a period of seven weeks from October 1 to November 22, before the December 2 2007 State Duma elections, four out of five national TV channels in Russia gave the ruling powers more than 75 percent of their prime time news coverage and that those media neglected to give any significant airtime to opposition parties to challenge the positions of the ruling powers. The CJES concluded that President Putin, the government and the United Russia party dominated coverage and the state-funded media failed comprehensively to give balanced and objective coverage of the election campaign.

The Association of European Journalists also notes that the independent International Press Institute, in its November 2007 update, states that pressures on the Russian media to provide favourable coverage to the ruling party in an unbalanced way has increased in the past six months. The IPI says the methods employed by State officials and others includes the aggressive harassment of journalists and the selective use of bureaucratic regulations.

As you know, Russia's Federal Law on State Duma Elections (51-FZ with latest amendments from 24.07.2007) states clearly (Article 51) that media election coverage shall be objective and accurate and shall not violate the equality of candidates or political parties. It also lays down (Article 62) that if any media organisations violate these rules the Election Commission may take action through the law-enforcement authorities, courts or executive bodies to enforce the law.

In view of the evidence I have mentioned, I ask you respectfully to reply to these points: Are you aware of the evidence of serious political bias allegedly shown by state-controlled and other national media in Russia during this election campaign? And have you taken or will you take appropriate and urgent action towards the political parties and media organisations involved to stop them from violating important provisions of the Russian election law?

The AEJ has a membership of about 1000 journalists working in countries within the Council of Europe area. We have no Russian members and also no intention to take the side of any political party or group in Russia. But as media professionals we are concerned to support the upholding of legitimate media freedoms, especially in European countries, including Russia, which are members of the Council of Europe.

I look forward to receiving your reply,

Yours faithfully,

William Horsley  
Media Freedom Representative of the Association of European Journalists  
December 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.