

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1280/09
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to the Commission

Subject: High-level corruption and worsening press freedom situation in Bulgaria

Freedom of the press has diminished considerably in Bulgaria since the country joined the EU in January 2007, the international media watchdog group RWB has warned in a report of 5 February 2009. It has emerged, furthermore, that the State Agency for National Security (DANS) has tapped the phones of a number of lawmakers and journalists.

The group also found that the official Union of Bulgarian Journalists has little authority and that the journalists' code of ethics remains little more than a piece of paper. For example, some reporters are prone to accepting 'business gifts', since journalism is not a highly esteemed or lucrative career. In addition, a 1998 law banning members of the country's communist-era national security from holding executive positions in news media is not being strictly observed, according to the RWB. According to the group, the country's journalists experience two levels of press freedom, with those in Sofia enjoying more latitude than their counterparts in provincial cities, where powerful figures linked to local officials frown on honest reporting.

Assen Yordanov, a journalist from Burgas, told RWB that the situation had worsened over the past 15 years. The most sensitive subject, he said, was corruption involving high-level officials in the judiciary or in the interior ministry. 'But the number of such subjects is growing in this neo-feudal society,' said Yordanov, who has endured threats and a physical assault.

1. How will the Commission fight against corruption in Bulgaria involving high-level officials in the judiciary and the interior ministry?
2. How will the Commission prevent any further worsening of the media freedom situation in Bulgaria?