

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1282/09  
by Elly de Groen-Kouwenhoven (Verts/ALE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Organised crime, business and political pressure threaten journalism in Bulgaria

Investigative journalism and media pluralism in Bulgaria are under serious threat from organised crime and from various forms of pressure from political and business quarters, watchdog Reporters Without Borders said in a report published on 6 February 2009.

The report, based on a fact-finding mission two years after Bulgaria joined the European Union in January 2007, led to the conclusion that the hopes of democratisation born at the start of the 1990s had not all evaporated but their fulfilment now depended on major reforms that were slow in coming.

'Press freedom is not progressing in Bulgaria. Organised crime has understood the advantages that can be derived from controlling news and information and they have extended their ascendancy over the media. The grey economy's hold over the press is now threatening news diversity and the survival of investigative journalism. We are disturbed by the situation we found on our visit to Sofia', Reporters Without Borders said. Bulgaria was ranked 59th out of 173 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

The Reporters Without Borders report said: 'Some journalists are resigned to censoring themselves, while others continue to actively resist business and political pressure. But Georgy Stoev's murder last April and a brutal attack on Ognyan Stefanov in September have served as reminders of the risks run by those who refuse to let the press be transformed into nothing more than a communication tool in the service of private interests'.

How will the Commission fight these organised criminal groups and their ability to undermine the press?