



Strasbourg, 31 May 2011

CDL-UDT(2011)009syn
Engl. Only

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

**UNIDEM
CAMPUS TRIESTE SEMINAR**

**“INFORMATION, (SOCIAL) MEDIA
AND THE CIVIL SERVICE”
2- 5 May 2011**

**Council of the Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia
Sala De Rinaldini
Piazza Oberdan 5
Trieste, Italy**

SYNOPSIS

The UNIDEM Campus Trieste is the Venice Commission's programme of legal training for civil servants. The second seminar in 2011 took place in Trieste from 2 May to 5 May 2011 on the topic : "Information, (Social) Media and the Civil Service.

The seminar brought together 21 civil servants from ministries dealing with matters relating to information and civil servants from 11 European countries¹ (financed by the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia). Two civil servants from Tunisia also participated (financed by a voluntary contribution from the Government of Turkey for co-operation with Tunisia). The event aimed at highlighting the existing European standards and case-law relating to information and the civil service, and at an exchange of information on the situation and experiences in the countries of the participants with respect to various aspects of information, (social) media and the civil service.

During the training, the participants heard lectures given by leading European experts in this field and explored various aspects of this field through specific workshops. The seminar was made up of three parts : Part I: overview of issues regarding information and the civil service; Part II: The public administration and the media; and Part III: The civil servant as whistleblower.

The seminar began with *an overview of issues regarding information and the civil service*, followed by a workshop on "Information and the civil service: handling information, exchanging information and the public's right to know". Special attention was paid to the concept of freedom of information, as well as transparency and access to information. The development of, aims of, and characteristics of access to information laws were examined. Key provisions with respect to access of information regimes were discussed. The administrative reactions to access to information were explored.

The seminar continued with a lecture on "The right of access to public information in Europe: emerging legal standards". It dealt with, among other things, administrative transparency and the purpose of access to information. It reviewed access to information laws in 14 European countries and noted the emergence of common rules, mechanisms and criteria used in Europe to balance the policy goal and legal obligation of disclosure of information with the requirements of confidentiality. A workshop followed on "Administrative transparency in the balance", where three European Court of Justice cases were analysed and discussed by the participants.

Part II of the seminar, the public administration and the media, took place on the second day. The morning started with a lecture on "Transparency in the public administration: the role of the media". The lecture first presented key concepts and notions such as transparency, access to information, public administration and the media (traditional media and new media). It then went on to deal with transparency in the European space, with particular emphasis being placed on Council of Europe and European Union instruments and two judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The morning continued with a lecture on "Putting social media to use in public administration", which defined social media and explored the potential of social media use by government. The lecture reviewed the past five years of the communications landscape in the UK and the lessons learned. The lecture noted, *inter alia*, the importance of having clear guidance and support for civil servants' participation in social media and summarised the guidance given to the civil servants.

The afternoon of the second day was dedicated to workshops, where ideas presented in the morning's lectures were further discussed and developed.

¹ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Slovenia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine.

On the third day, part of the morning session was devoted to national presentations during which a number of participants had the opportunity to present the specific experience of their respective countries, i.e. Georgia, Serbia, Romania and Croatia. A general discussion of the national situation in these and other countries took place.

Part III of the seminar, the civil servant as whistleblower, took place on the third day. It started with a lecture on "The civil servant and disclosure of information in the public interest". Key issues such as the benefits of whistleblowing, the need for protection of whistleblowers, the international and regional conventions for the protection whistleblowers and the stark contrast with the existing legal provisions and frameworks and cultural and political obstacles to whistleblowing were presented, and recommendations were made. The workshop involved the discussion of, *inter alia*, the criteria for effective whistleblowing legislation and effective reporting mechanisms in institutions. The workshop used international guidelines to explore, *inter alia*, the differences between protection for whistleblowers and informants, the difference between administrative protection and protection against retaliation and harassment, and whether whistleblowing and denunciation are the same.

The last lecture dealt with the subject of "Whistleblowers and the protection of journalists' sources". Special attention was paid to the instruments (recommendations, resolutions) and work in the areas by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

On the last day, a workshop was held on how to train others ("Training the trainers") whereby the participants discussed various forms of possible follow-up initiatives to be organised upon their return in order for them to pass on the knowledge they acquired during this seminar to their colleagues.

The participants also met with representatives of the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia who addressed the participants and reaffirmed their support for the UniDem initiative.

The written reports related to the lectures will be available shortly on the Venice Commission's web site.