

YPC AMONG 50 AWARDED

On May 18 the ceremony of presenting the first annual Democracy and Civil Society Award established jointly by the US and the European Union, took place at the American Embassy in Yerevan

The Democracy and Civil Society Award was established in May 1997 at the joint European Union and US Summit in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan and 40th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. 140 NGOs, communities and individuals from 28 countries of the Central and Eastern Europe and the NIS were nominated to claim this (from now on annual) award for their contributions in such basic spheres of democracy building as; conflict resolution, human rights protection, good governance, environmental protection, protection of women's, minority and media rights, promotion of community activism, the rule of law, and civic education. 50 organisations and individuals were recognised as Award winners. These were chosen by an independent commission, which included representatives from the EU and the US. Four organizations were nominated from Armenia: The Helsinki Association of Armenia, the Helsinki Commission of Armenia, the Lawyers and Politologists Union and the Yerevan Press Club. Two of these - the Helsinki Association of Armenia and the YPC - were handed out certificates and prizes of \$20,000 each.

At the ceremony UK Ambassador to Armenia John Mitchener marked the role of the Yerevan Press Club in "uniting active and progressive journalists," boosting the level of professionalism and contributing in the development of the legal basis for the media.

"Our goal is to expand the environment of high professionalism, dignity and journalistic ethics. We have succeeded in establishing such an atmosphere among the YPC members and we hope it will become a norm for the Armenian journalists in general," said YPC President Boris Navasardian, expressing gratitude for the award.

Besides the YPC, among prize-winner journalistic unions were also the Press Institute of Mongolia, and the Ilkhom Center for the Study of Journalistic Problems (Uzbekistan). In Azerbaijan - the Azerbaijani Chapter of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly and the Azerbaijani Women's Rights Society were noted. In Georgia - the Varketili Society and Elena Tevdoradze, MP, were nominated.

"First of all I want to congratulate the Yerevan Press Club with the US-EU Democracy and Civil Society Award for their promotion of essential principles of democracy and civil society." It was with these words that Hans van den Broek, EU Commissioner on International Affairs, opened his speech at the press-conference on June 2 held at the RA Foreign Affairs Ministry. He underscored that the Award was an indication of media's significant role in Armenia, which was only commendable.

Gayaneh TERZIAN

The letter of congratulation to the Yerevan Press Club by the US President, President of the European Commission and the UK Prime-Minister runs as follows:

Dear Award Winner

You are one of fifty organisations and individuals to receive a US-EU Democracy and Civil Society Award, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan and the 40th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. On behalf of the United States of America and the European Union, we are delighted to recognise your courage and commitment to the promotion of the essential principles underlying democracy and civil society.

Your efforts provide encouragement and inspiration to us all. We are pleased that the prize of \$20,000 will permit you to continue your invaluable work in pursuit of our common goals.

We wish you every success in the future.

Signed:

William Clinton

Jacques Santer

Tony Blair

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