Strict quarantine obligation for foreign journalists coming to Norway - in violation of the ECHR and the EEA agreement

The Norwegian Press Association (NP), the Norwegian Union of Journalists (NJ) and the Association of Norwegian Editors (NR) are asking the government to amend the Covid-19 regulations as soon as possible, so that the required exceptions are established for foreign journalists on assignment in Norway.

The quarantine obligation (of 10 days) is problematic because it will make it virtually impossible for foreign journalists to cover news events in Norway.

The press organizations have requested a legal assessment of the quarantine obligation. The lawyers Per Andreas Bjørgan and Jon Wessel-Aas conclude that the scheme is contrary to both the European Convention on Human Rights and the obligations under the EEA Agreement. The quarantine obligation constitutes a disproportionate interference with the freedom of the press and fundamental rights.

In addition to the quarantine obligation, other journalists who do not engage in current news journalism are denied entry to Norway. In sum, the country is now closed to most journalists.

- We believe this is a serious interference in journalists' ability to cover current affairs and incidents, and thus in freedom of the press. We can not accept that. The press organizations request that this must be cleared up, says Secretary General of the Norwegian Press Association, Elin Floberghagen.

The demand is addressed in a letter to the Prime Minister's Office. Subsequently, however, SMK has asked the Ministry of Justice and Emergency Management to process the case. These in turn have forwarded it to the Ministry of Health.

- We contacted the Prime Minister's Office because we believe the problem is both about principle and the case also affects several ministries and directorates. Anyway, we expect the government to resolve the matter quickly, says Floberghagen.

Background:

Foreign journalists are specifically exempted from the refusal of entry into Norway, also after the tightening of the entry regulations that came into force in February this year.

The problem for foreign journalists, however, is that the Norwegian authorities require that they must both be news journalists, and that they must be quarantined for 10 days before they can start working in Norway.

EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA), controlling the EEA agreement, is looking into this matter as well.

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