

Press and broadcasting laws should be amended: Report

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29/03/2012 10:42:00



The Government Information Bureau introduces the process of the revision on Press Law and Broadcasting Law to the media representatives at a briefing session

Local company E-Research & Solutions (ERS), who was awarded a MOP 3.5 million tender to conduct a deliberative opinion poll about the eventual amendment of the Press Law and the Audio-visual Broadcasting Act, yesterday presented an interim report of its preliminary conclusions. The final report of the year-long project that includes scholars from the US, Hong Kong and Portugal should be ready by the end of August 2012. But the director of ERS e-Research Lab, Angus Cheong, revealed that the majority of the citizens expressed that the Press Law and the Audio-visual Broadcasting Act should be amended. Hence, during the first questionnaire survey, the percentage of citizens who considered it important to address the Press Law reached 57.2 percent. That percentage increased to 71.4 percent on the third questionnaire made by ERS.

One of the most relevant issues being analyzed concerns whether or not to establish the Press Council and the Broadcasting Council. Both institutions are referred to in the current laws, enacted two decades ago, but were never

implemented.

The issue was discussed during a “deliberative polling day” carried out on December 4, which collected the opinions of journalists and other citizens. The questions about this issue included several approaches. One of them was the “setting up a press council according to the law where Government dominates but with journalists representatives,” while other options ruled out any government intervention. The majority of the citizens interviewed tended to go for a lesser government role, considering that a council should be established in any form stipulated under the current law, but should be formed by the industry themselves and with representatives from the public. As for the Internet regulation, most respondents supported hypothesis stating that the Internet should be regulated, “but not under the supervision of the press law or any form of press council”.

On whether to draft the journalists’ code of ethics, the majority of citizens agreed that the drafting was important, but the opinion varied on how the drafting should be carried out. However, the preference goes to “creating it independently by journalists, without government or legislative interference”.

No contradictions

The Government Information Bureau (GCS) director, Victor Chan, stressed that GCS held a total of 23 meetings with representatives of six press associations and 30 media companies. “In summary, it can be said that there are no contradictions between the views of sector and citizens concerning the Councils. The prevalent opinion in the media sector does not accept representatives of the government in the Councils, while citizens argue that the Councils shouldn’t be part of a legal body and should be created by the communication sector with the participation of citizens. The positions of the sector and citizens do not contradict the principle advocated by the Government. That is, the self-regulatory entity should be defined by the industry itself,” he said.

Questioned by journalists, Angus Cheong defended the use of the deliberative polling day. “It was a very deep work held during a full day with the participation of 2,000 people, who gave many opinions,” he said.