



United States Mission to the OSCE

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting *Promotion of Pluralism in the New Media* **Session I:** **Challenges and opportunities for new media to** **foster pluralism**

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The United States would like to thank the introducers for initiating this discussion on the challenges and opportunities for new media in fostering pluralism. The issue of pluralism in new media is of fundamental importance to the United States. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in February, “The Internet has become the public space of the 21st century — the world’s town square, classroom, marketplace, coffeehouse, and nightclub. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there, all 2 billion of us and counting.” It is essential, therefore, that we ensure pluralism within this new public space. We can only do so by protecting the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and assembly on the Internet. When these freedoms are protected, Internet users can access facts and a multiplicity of views on local and international news; can communicate their own political, religious, and social ideas and beliefs; and can form associations and movements. The protection of these freedoms on the Internet can, by extension, facilitate the protection of other human rights.

As we have already seen, the Internet has the potential to enable users to organize disaster relief, expose corruption, and bring together experts to address challenges on a global level. The ability to exercise fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and assembly over digital technologies can also improve the economic situation of individuals and states by helping to generate new ideas and encouraging creativity and entrepreneurship. And we have witnessed time and again, particularly in the events in North Africa and the Middle East, how the Internet and other digital technologies enable citizens to organize and to demand better governance. The unique nature of the Internet and other technologies enabled individuals to disseminate information in “real time” and to mobilize their fellow citizens.

However, the mere existence of the Internet and other new technologies does not guarantee the existence of pluralism. Governments that seek to limit diversity of thought can and do suppress the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly on the Internet just as they do in town squares and in other forms of media. Unfortunately, even within the OSCE, we all too frequently see laws and practices that stifle the free flow of information and freedom of expression online in a manner that is inconsistent with international obligations and OSCE commitments. For instance, we have read reports that, on July 3, the Belarusian government blocked the social networking sites of Facebook, Twitter, and VKontakte to undermine the activities of political activists who sought to peacefully protest government policies.

As participating States of the OSCE, we have all affirmed our commitment to protect the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly as “basic human right[s] and fundamental component[s] of a democratic society.” These commitments apply to all forms of media, including new media.

We look forward to the next two sessions when we will discuss issues of the digital switchover and Internet regulation within the OSCE. We expect these discussions will do much to inform our preparations for the Vilnius Ministerial.

Thank you.