



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply to the Russian Federation on Social Media and Freedom of Speech

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 11, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Just very briefly, to make sure our friends in the OSCE worldwide are not misled, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” The First Amendment was designed by the Founders to make sure that the government didn’t come in and control speech or prohibit speech or, in any way, impinge upon speech. It’s the essence of an actual free society, which my colleague can take a good lesson from.

Major online social media companies in the United States are private actors and they establish their own terms of service for the use of their platforms. They are not under the supervision or control of the United States government and it would be prohibited as such. These terms of service that these private companies do establish their own rules for the own use of their respective platforms. Many of those rules are designed to prevent the misuse of their platforms or to spread disinformation or hate speech. You know, sometimes these decisions they make to enforce their own rules result in controversy and that leads to further debate and discussion, and open discussion is fine. We congratulate the Russian Federation for participating in our open discussion of our own open platforms that we have in the United States. It is the hallmark of having free and independent media, both online and offline, where these issues can be deliberated openly and transparently.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.