



**Speech by Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans,
OSCE Ministerial Council, Kyiv, 6 December 2013**

Thank you very much Mr Chairman,

Looking around the table, I assume that most of us are over 35. Of course I am only talking about the men. But having said this, I think that we sometimes fail to understand the profound changes that our societies are going through. Because we fail to understand the revolution that information technology is bringing about for younger generations.

I was on Maidan Square last night, talking to students. They didn't really have political demands. They didn't have much interest in party-political strife. They were talking about their futures; they were talking about their aspirations, about their wishes to travel, to meet other Europeans, to gather knowledge to build a future. And talking to them I was wondering, What is actually the difference between them and my own children? I could hardly find any difference – perhaps linguistic differences, but that is just about all.

I sometimes believe that we underestimate the changes that are going on in their heads, in the way they think, in the way they operate, in the way they interact; the information technology that very often is the driving force behind all this. Communication methods like social media are things we try to get used to. But they were born into this new world, and they use these communication technologies as though they were always like that.

This poses a new challenge to us all, because at the same time, in my country and in other countries, people are concerned. They are concerned about the risk that this new form of communication, of sharing information, of showing who you are, is open to manipulation by the outside world, by government, by authorities. We need to strike a balance between the essential need for people to feel that their privacy is safeguarded by government and at the same time our need, as governments, to provide security for those same people. Of course, the people who threaten our security also make use of information technology and the internet and all the instruments that are provided for that.

That is why I believe that this organisation is uniquely placed to look these challenges in the eye and to provide answers to these challenges, to help us strike a balance between the need to provide security and the need to ensure privacy. To strike a balance between on the one hand the need to allow people to communicate and on the other hand the need for people to protect their personal liberty. Because we see that this great force of communication and the revolution in the way people think and operate socially can also be manipulated by governments.

We have ample examples – many in the OSCE area – of governments using the internet to slander journalists. Or of using their control over internet access by blocking sites on an election date, as happened in Belarus for instance. There are ample examples of governments trying to use the internet to gain a stronger position, to limit the freedom of expression, to limit the freedom of social contact. So we need to find an answer in the OSCE to prevent this from happening.

The Netherlands started an organisation, a club of countries, called the Freedom Online Coalition to make sure that we invest in an open, safe and free internet. Fifteen OSCE participating States are members of this coalition, and we invite others to join us. We want to limit regulation to the absolute minimum, to support those people who are fighting for freedom in cyberspace with their activities, and to protect them against the pressure of governments. I believe we need to make sure that all the power that emanates from information technology is put to good use: ensuring freedom of speech, freedom of expression, the freedom to make your own choices in your life and not to be prevented from doing this by governments or by other actors in cyberspace.

Turning back to Ukraine, Mr Chairman, I think this is a country with a unique position in Europe. It does not have to choose between being part of the East or being part of the West, because no other country is so central in Europe as Ukraine. I think it would be a tremendous mistake for one or the other party to force Ukraine to make a choice. It is up to the Ukrainian people to make a choice about where they want to be. And I would argue that the Ukrainian people will choose to be Europeans, much as other Europeans make the same choice. It is not a political choice. It is a geographical choice that will create opportunities to be friends with people to the east and people to the west in an equal manner.

As far as I am concerned, looking back at the last two days here in Ukraine, I have to say that I respect the open way in which the Ukrainian government has reacted to the criticism expressed, be it around the table here today or be it publicly, by myself or by others. And I hope that this open way of reacting to criticism is going to continue after this meeting ends, after we have all returned to our capitals. Because I believe Ukraine could show the rest of Europe and the rest of the world that there are ways of sitting down with those with whom you don't agree, ways of solving issues that create a better platform for the future.

Mr Chairman, I am very happy with the fact that we have now reached agreement on confidence-building measures on cyber security. This is a good starting point for creating a broader platform to make the internet an area where freedom is endorsed, freedom is enhanced and where people can be creative, where they create a better future for themselves. Where people can start travelling in cyber space before they travel in reality, and can thereby create more understanding between all the peoples in the OSCE area.

Let me end by thanking the Ukrainian CiO for a job well-done, and for the hospitality here in Kyiv. I wish our Swiss colleagues the best of luck in taking over your responsibilities, creating yet another success for the OSCE in the year to come.

Thank you very much.