



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Welcoming the Extension of the Mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 7, 2013

The United States warmly welcomes the extension of the mandate of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic, and congratulates her and her experienced team.

Representative Mijatovic has done excellent work in assisting participating States in upholding their OSCE commitments in the areas of free expression and media freedom, and has exhibited admirable fairness in her approach. No nation has a perfect record with respect to free expression and free media, including the United States, and we appreciate the constructive criticism and actionable advice offered by Representative Mijatovic to all OSCE participating States, as well as to media professionals in the region.

It is our view that how governments treat freedom of expression and media freedom represents a “canary in the coal mine” with regard to democratic development. That is, when nations make strides toward pluralistic democracy, one of the first signs of this progress is loosening government controls on free expression and media freedom. Conversely, when governments backtrack on their commitment to democracy, one of the first signs is often a crackdown on free expression and media freedom.

Unfortunately, we are seeing ever more examples of this phenomenon in the OSCE region. Counter to their OSCE commitments, governments in certain participating States have taken legal and regulatory actions with the effect of restricting speech and the spread of information among citizens. Such actions include blocking of, or outright bans on, certain websites and publications; licensing restrictions targeting independent media outlets; and politically motivated criminal prosecutions for defamation of public figures. We have also heard unsettling talk of national or sub-regional Intra-nets replacing the global Internet, purportedly for reasons of “protecting” citizens or national security but in reality for the purpose of stifling the free flow of ideas.

Meanwhile, as Representative Mijatovic has comprehensively reported, journalists and bloggers have been subjected to violence, intimidation and harassment related to their work, with perpetrators of these acts often remaining unpunished. Authorities in many participating States continue to imprison journalists for performing their professional duties, often on dubious charges – charges intended to chill the environment for investigative reporting.

We echo Representative Mijatovic's call for greater protections in the OSCE region for the personal security of journalists, and we intend to work with her office and all OSCE participating States this year to reach a decision promoting the safety of journalists. We also applaud her efforts to assist participating States in reforming their media laws to protect journalists from unwarranted prosecution as extremists, and to push for decriminalization of defamation throughout the region.

We encourage participating States that have not done so to co-sponsor the Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age, which reaffirms that all OSCE commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms – including the freedom of expression so ably championed by Representative Mijatovic – apply online as well as offline.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.