



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Dunja Mijatović**

Opening remarks

**Freedom of Expression for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
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Bibliotheksaal, Hofburg**

Dear Ambassadors, Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome all of you here. Thank you for accepting our invitation, and for bringing your important views to today's meeting during this very busy period of the year.

I am also pleased to open our discussion on an issue that has been at the attention of my Office's work since its creation 17 years ago.

I would also like to thank the governments of Norway, Turkey and the United States for their financial support of this event.

Freedom of Expression.

Tolerance and Non-Discrimination.

When we discuss these topics, far too often freedom of expression is placed on one side, while tolerance and non-discrimination are placed on the other.

As if these values could not co-exist.

As if they mutually weaken, and sometimes even exclude each other.

I believe that this approach is wrong, and we need to change it if we want to advance both values.

For tolerance to increase, we need the freedom to express ourselves and discuss the causes of intolerance and the ways we can combat them.

For freedom of expression to strengthen, we need tolerance towards the views that we disagree with, even those that we find disturbing or shocking, because it is only through such pluralistic discussions that we become well-informed and therefore valuable members of our societies.

We need to keep in mind that freedom of expression is a precious instrument. It facilitates the dissemination and discussion of all kinds of beliefs, thoughts and creeds. Therefore, first and above all, freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital FOR the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Hence the title of our event.

Nothing makes an idea more solid and respectable than the fact that it has been widely discussed, questioned and criticized.

Ideas and beliefs imposed by authorities or excluded from any form of comment or critical analysis turn out to be weak and less respected. They can also turn into a dangerous tool of misinformation by those in power. Sadly, we see many examples of such an approach within the OSCE.

This year is the first example that comes to mind. As the crisis in and around Ukraine demonstrates, propaganda and deterioration of media freedom often go hand-in-hand to fuel and often escalate a conflict.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, we should also not forget that the right to freedom of expression includes the right to “shock, disturb and offend”.

If you look at history, human progress relies upon the fact that everything can be questioned and challenged.

Thus we need to *tolerate intolerance* or at least try to fight it using “tolerant instruments” such as free and pluralistic discussions and public exposures that contrast with other forms of speech.

Of course, there are some forms of intolerance which are not acceptable in a democratic society. These are the forms which can be directly connected to violent actions, harassment or other forms of unacceptable behavior against communities or certain parts of society.

However, two main ideas have to be kept in mind here:

a) In some cases intolerance is exercised and promoted by States by restricting the visibility and the right of certain groups to express and to share their views and ways of life; and

b) Laws and regulations trying to limit unacceptable forms of intolerance and discrimination should not be used in an arbitrary manner; otherwise they can, and often do, become a powerful tool of the authorities to restrict and sometimes even silence critical or uncomfortable opinions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is time for the OSCE to move beyond the old discussion of “freedom of expression OR tolerance”. Not only does such an approach not lead to any advancement of the human rights that we all hold so dear, but it can significantly hinder our efforts to strengthen both values.

What we need instead is a thought-provoking discussion that will help us get closer to respecting “each other's sovereign equality and individuality”, as the participating States already set forth in the Helsinki Final Act almost 40 years ago.

With this being said, I very much look forward to hearing our speakers and all participants express your opinions throughout the day.

But first, I am pleased to hand the floor to our distinguished keynote speaker, and moderator of our panel discussions, Susan Benesch.

Susan is a Faculty Associate at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, as well as the Founder and Director of the “Dangerous Speech Project”.

Your experience and knowledge about the issues we will discuss and debate make you a unique addition to our event, and I am very pleased that we can benefit from your views today.