



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

**Statement in response to the
Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Ms. Teresa Ribeiro**

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1313th meeting of the Permanent Council,
13 May 2021

Madame Chairperson,

We welcome Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro at the Permanent Council and thank her for presenting the first regular report on the media related issues across the OSCE region.

Ukraine commends dedicated efforts of the Representative and the team in this challenging time of global pandemic and takes this opportunity to reiterate our full support for the mandate of the Representative.

The efficient implementation of the OSCE commitments in the area of freedom of expression remains an integral part of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. The existing as well as emerging threats and challenges to freedom of expression and media freedom throughout the OSCE region make the work of the Representative as relevant as ever.

In this respect we wish to express high appreciation of our close cooperation with Ms. Ribeiro in addressing a variety of issues related to freedom and pluralistic media in Ukraine as well as for their support of my country's efforts in fostering implementation of relevant OSCE commitments.

Strengthening freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists, remains among the key priorities in Ukraine.

Madame Representative,

We have carefully studied your report and took note of a number of cases on non-compliance with the OSCE commitments in some participating States as well as observations regarding the challenges to freedom of the media in our region. We share your view that "different cases have different backgrounds and dynamics". Indeed, none of the participating States is immune to the challenges related to freedom of expression and media freedom.

At the same time, we should be very cautious when finding common features and placing the backgrounds which totally differ by their nature on a par. Here we refer to the use of repressive legislation on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" to curtail independent media and political opposition, on the one hand, and the legitimate measures taken in order to prevent financing terrorism and countering malicious disinformation spread from abroad, on the other.

Madam Representative,

In response to the point raised in your report I would like to stress that the measures introduced in Ukraine were aimed at limiting the actions of the specific person who participated in financing terrorist organizations in eastern Ukraine. Moreover, there is evidence that this person uses a Russian passport to cross the border, while being a member of the Ukrainian parliament.

The restrictions have been applied to the businesses owned by this person including the media companies. Such measures are not directed against the journalists and their work.

Over the past few years, the mentioned media companies got most of warnings issued by the media regulator in the field. In 2020 alone, more than 20 warnings and penalties for various violations of Ukrainian legislation were applied to these media companies. Most of the violations are related to hate speech, distortion of facts, recognized by the international community, and other exclusively propaganda techniques on the air.

I'm sure, Ms. Ribeiro, that your visit to Ukraine will provide you with the first hand and more detailed information on this and other relevant matters of our mutual interest. As Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba mentioned in his invitation letter: "We highly appreciate our close and longstanding cooperation with the institution you represent and do hope that under your leadership this meaningful dialogue will be further broadened and enhanced".

Distinguished colleagues,

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has a direct negative impact on the exercise of the rights of journalists and media freedom on the temporary occupied territories of the Crimean Peninsula, Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. We encourage greater involvement of the RFOM in following and reacting to these issues.

The active use of the Russian legislation "on counteracting extremism and separatism" as a pretext to ban journalists' activities, as well as show trials of journalists and activists disagreeing with the occupation of Crimea, have in fact completed the process of cleansing the Crimean information landscape of free expression.

Even civic journalism – phenomenon which appeared in response to complete information isolation of the Crimean Peninsula – remains at risk of total elimination by the illegally established repressive Russian bodies.

In this respect we wish once again to bring the attention of the Permanent Council and RFoM to the faiths of Crimean Tatar civic journalists Osman Arifmemetov, Marlen Asanov, Remzi Bekirov, Timur Ibragimov, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliyev, Amet Suleimanov, Ruslan Suleimayev and Rustem Scheihaliev. All of them were illegally detained under the politically motivated charges by the Russian authorities.

Another example of an ongoing campaign to intimidate journalists in occupied Crimea is the case of Vladyslav Yesypenko, a freelance journalist working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Ukrainian-language "Crimea.Realities" outlet.

Vladyslav Yesypenko was detained on 10 March by the Russian FSB after attending a peaceful gathering in Simferopol marking the anniversary of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko's birth. After his detention, the Russian television channel Crimea24 broadcasted an interview with Yesypenko that was widely denounced as a forced confession.

Yesypenko's arrest is yet another example of a continued campaign of pressure and harassment directed at journalists working in Crimea. To date, nearly 60 journalists and reporters working with the "Crimea.Realities" outlet alone have been forced to stop their work or leave Crimea as a result.

In this regard we would continue to urge the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to use all available instruments to facilitate the immediate release of Vladyslav Yesypenko and Crimean Tatar civic journalists. We also call on the RFoM to further remain seized with the issues that threaten freedom of the media and expression in the occupied by Russia territories of Ukraine.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion, let me again thank the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for the presented report. We look forward to continuing our close co-operation, including during upcoming RFoM visit to Ukraine, and wish her every success in all future endeavours.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.