



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “World Press Freedom Day”

As delivered by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1144th meeting of the Permanent Council,
4 May 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

Marking the World Press Freedom Day, we wish to emphasize the critical importance of free media for the development of a democratic, pluralistic and prosperous society.

Ukraine is strongly committed to implementation of respective OSCE commitments and takes consistent steps to improve the environment for free media. Let me mention, in particular, the transformation of the country’s state radio and television companies into a public broadcaster, reduction of state influence in the print sector through launching privatization of hundreds of print outlets, many of them regional and municipal newspapers, enactment of legislation on disclosure of identities of media owners. Additional legislative measures have been taken to strengthen the safety of journalists and remove impediments in their work. The Ukrainian authorities co-operate closely with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media making use of valuable expertise and assistance in enhancing the implementation of relevant commitments.

In this light we are pleased to note that, for a consecutive year, in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, published last month by the respected international NGO “Reporters without Borders”, Ukraine again raised in the table, this time by 5 notches compared to 2016 report. As the “Reporters without Borders” point out that “since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, the Ukrainian authorities have adopted a number of reforms, including media ownership transparency and access to state-held information”, the independent organization “Freedom House” emphasizes in its Freedom of the Press 2017 report that “Ukraine’s media environment has significantly improved since a change in government in 2014, and ongoing reforms continue to strengthen the legislative environment for journalists and outlets”. These independent assessments mark important progress already achieved by Ukraine and also serve as an incentive to continue focused efforts in enhancing the media freedom in the country.

However, there are two parts of Ukraine that experience severe restrictions on media freedom and clamp-down on free journalism, including harassment and

violence against journalists. These parts are the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and certain areas of Donbas, illegally occupied by Russia and Russia-backed illegal armed formations. Systematic and massive abuses of the fundamental human rights and freedoms in these areas are concealed from the international community by deliberate policies aimed at intimidating and terminating the activities of independent mass-media and journalists. The journalists, who dare to report differently from the position of the occupation authorities, are harassed, detained and interrogated. The mentioned Freedom House report “Freedom of the Press 2017” gave the occupied Crimea the fourth (out of 66) worst result with 94 total score out of 100, 100 being the least free. The Russian hybrid forces prevent access of independent mass media and journalists to the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and continue violence against the press and attacks on media professionals.

We condemn Russia’s brutal persecution of Ukrainian journalists – Mykola Semena in the occupied Crimea and Roman Sushchenko in Moscow as both of them have been placed behind bars under fabricated charges. We demand their immediate release and call on the OSCE Chairmanship, Institutions and the participating States to use in full the available possibilities to secure their release.

We remain deeply concerned about a massive campaign of propaganda and incitement of hatred against Ukraine and Ukrainians, perpetrated by Russia’s state-owned media and public figures, which has played a significant role in fuelling Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the conflict in Donbas. While significantly reducing the space for independent and pluralistic media, the Russian authorities strengthened the grip over state-owned media transforming them into powerful instruments of state-driven propaganda. As the “Reporters without Borders” point out in their 2017 report, “with draconian laws and website blocking, the pressure on independent media has grown steadily since Vladimir Putin’s return to the Kremlin in 2012. Leading independent news outlets have either been brought under control or throttled out of existence. As TV channels continue to inundate viewers with propaganda, the climate has become increasingly oppressive for those who try to maintain quality journalism or question the new patriotic and neo-conservative narratives. The oppressive climate at the national level encourages powerful provincial officials far from Moscow to crack down even harder on their media critics.” This independent assessment by media professionals, together with others, of the extremely worrisome situation in Russia must foster the OSCE’s constant attention to the serious failures of this country to observe its OSCE commitments, in particular on media freedom and pluralism. Russia’s clear departure from OSCE commitments threatens peace, stability and social cohesion beyond the borders of Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.