



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

Statement on “Russian media”

As delivered by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1121st meeting of the Permanent Council,
01 December 2016

Mr. Chairperson,

During the review of current issues at the last meeting of the Permanent Council of 24 November 2016 the EU Delegation delivered a substantive response to absurd assertions of the Russian Delegation alleging so called “discrimination of Russian media” in the European Union. Having acquainted ourselves with the full written text of the Russian statement we found that it also contained mention of Ukraine and therefore we would like to respond.

First, we wish to align ourselves with the arguments made by the European Union in response to Russia’s unfounded claims. In particular, we wish to echo the point that disinformation is not an alternative opinion. In addition, we would like to encourage the Russian delegation to examine the situation from a different angle. As the findings of numerous independent non-governmental organizations, including “Reporters without Frontiers” and “The Committee to Protect Journalists”, highlight, real discrimination of Russian media has been happening in Russia itself for a number of years and is often described as a clamp-down on free media. While significantly reducing the space for independent and pluralistic media, the authorities strengthened the grip over state-owned media transforming them into powerful instruments of state-driven propaganda. This propaganda has skillfully manipulated the anxieties of the people by circulating myths and outright fakes, generating images of virtual enemies and threats, inciting chauvinistic sentiments and hatred towards other nations, with a strong focus on Ukrainians. The incremental measures of the Russian authorities which had undercut the functioning of independent and pluralistic media ultimately led to severe discrimination against Russian media professionals and outlets in their own country. These measures shaped the current Russian state-owned and propagandistic media as threatening peace, stability and social cohesion beyond the borders of Russia.

In this light we would point out to one most recent telling example. The Russian authorities have kept silence in connection with the incident on 25 November 2016 when Russian journalists from Dozhd TV channel were detained by members of

the Russia-backed illegal armed formations in the occupied areas of the Donbas region of Ukraine. Two journalists, Sergey Yerzhenkov and Vasiliy Polonskiy, were detained at gunpoint, interrogated and escorted by force to the uncontrolled sections of Ukraine's border with Russia. All of their video footage was deleted from data carriers. According to accounts of journalist S.Yerzhenkov, the leader of the group of their captors had a strongly distinguishable Russian-language accent of a Moscow resident. This incident was preceded by similar cases concerning the journalists of Russian newspapers "Novaya gazeta" and "Pskovskaya guberniya". Each of them the Russian authorities let pass unnoticed, thereby clearly indicating that the area of their concern did not extend to Russia's few independent media that were outside governmental control. The Russian journalists and media outlets who attempt to objectively report on Russia-instigated conflict in Ukraine's Donbas are attacked, harassed and threatened. For our part, we express strong condemnation of this yet another case of brutal restrictions, imposed on operation of independent media representatives in the occupied areas of Donbas. This case is indicative of only one aspect of a long road ahead in creating the necessary security environment for full implementation of the provisions of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chairperson,

Addressing the raised issue one cannot overlook the significance attached by Russian military strategists to using media as an effective hybrid warfare instrument. Let us recall the views held by the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces about information resources as "one of the most effective types of weapon" and "falsification of events and restricting the functioning of the media" as "the main component of hybrid warfare". It was not accidental that the immediate measures which followed Russia's military intervention into the Crimea and Donbas included the cut-off of Ukrainian TV broadcasters and switch to Russia's state media as the integral component of the intervention force. Based on the experience of the last nearly three years since the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, there is plenty of evidence about special attachment to falsification of events not only in Russian military, but also diplomatic service.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has taken different forms and manifestations, including in its military, support of terrorism, political, economic and information components. While taking the necessary measures to defend itself from this multifaceted external aggression, Ukraine will continue to aim at observing the media freedom-related OSCE commitments and closely co-operate with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on enhancing their implementation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.