



United States Mission to the OSCE

Working Session 1

Fundamental Freedoms 1 including:

Freedom of expression, free media and information

Address by the OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media

Delivered by David J. Kramer, U.S. Head of Delegation
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,
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The United States extends its deep appreciation to Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) Dunja Mijatović for her exemplary service. Thank you for your statement today, for your regular public statements, and for your reports to the Permanent Council and Human Dimension Committee on the issues within your mandate.

We gather again in Warsaw to review the implementation of human dimension commitments in a climate of diminishing space for freedom of expression by members of the media and increasing threats against journalists in numerous places across the OSCE region. Regrettably, journalism remains a profession for which many pay the ultimate price for the pursuit and dissemination of facts and the expression of editorial opinion.

In addition to the risk of brutal violence, journalists in several countries face increasingly sophisticated means used by those in authority to punish dissenting and critical perspectives.

The United States remains concerned by the cumulative effect of laws enacted in Russia last year imposing strict control over information on the Internet, punishing vaguely defined “extremism,” and imposing greater legal liability on bloggers. New legislation on “undesirable foreign organizations” and Russia’s continued stigmatization of domestic NGOs under the foreign agents law, have had a chilling effect.

Additionally, Russian journalists continue to operate in a dangerous environment and culture of impunity. Murders of prominent journalists from *Novaya Gazeta*, one of Russia’s last independent papers, remain unsolved, while journalists still there the publication receive death threats. In July, journalist Yevgeny Khamaganov’s neck was broken when he was assaulted in Buryatia.

Russia’s crackdown on the freedom of expression has reached beyond its borders. Russia’s occupation of Crimea and its campaign of aggression in eastern Ukraine have included threats to and violence against journalists. In regions under separatist control, there have been hundreds of cases of assaults, abductions, detentions, threats, and intimidation of the media. In Russian-occupied Crimea and in eastern Ukraine, Russian authorities and combined Russian-separatist forces have attacked buildings where television channels operate, censored media outlets, and seized or destroyed equipment. Meanwhile, 11 Tatar media outlets in Crimea have been shuttered and independent-minded journalists have been searched, harassed, or expelled.

We share the concern about the rising use of propaganda and disinformation in the OSCE region. For the sake of their own democratic development, countries targeted by propaganda and

disinformation campaigns should combat them with facts and by protecting – not constricting – the space for freedom of expression.

In Azerbaijan, the government’s closure of the offices of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and its unjust imprisonment of investigative reporter Khadija Ismayilova and other journalists narrowed the space for freedom of the media and expression. The United States shares concerns raised by RFoM about freedom of expression and media in Azerbaijan. Even family members of media professionals in exile have been detained on questionable charges, including relatives of Ganimat Zahidov and Emin Milli.

The Representative on Freedom of the Media highlighted the detention of more than 20 media professionals in Turkey. During the June parliamentary elections in Turkey, ODIHR expressed serious concern that media professionals critical of the ruling party were subject to pressure and intimidation during the campaign and we have seen efforts to shut down Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Hungary is also cause for concern in the area of media freedom. Freedom House has cited a five-year decline in press freedom and categorizes Hungary as only partly free in this area. The government continues to exert control over print and television outlets and to channel its advertising to favored entities. Observers have cited a chilling effect and self-censorship in reaction to the government’s posture.

We are troubled by expanding threats to the freedom of expression in Central Asia, where governments appear to be cracking down on critical reporting and individual expression, especially online. In Tajikistan, government-ordered censorship of certain websites and social media platforms has restricted free speech, and observers are concerned new regulations requiring all media organizations to request government information from a single state media outlet will decrease government transparency. Kazakhstan’s closure last November of the *Adam Bol* magazine, known for its reporting on human rights issues and corruption, limits free speech and good governance. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, highly restrictive media environments remain and journalists face systematic pressure by government actors. Also in Uzbekistan, legislation nicknamed the “Blogger Law” holds bloggers legally accountable for the accuracy of their posts and makes them vulnerable to prosecution if the content of their blogs is deemed to be “extremist,” “separatist,” or slanderous of politicians.

In July, Human Rights Watch issued a report on the deteriorating climate for freedom of expression by the media in the Western Balkans. Punitive lawsuits, threats, physical attacks, smear campaigns, and other forms of intimidation against investigative journalists have been documented in countries across the region. We appreciate the RFOM’s continued attention to these threats against media freedom in the Western Balkans region and her office’s direct engagement with governments on the issue.

Freedom of expression, including by members of the media, is a fundamental freedom enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in a number of OSCE commitments, and we must continue to hold ourselves and each other accountable to those obligations and commitments. The United States is not without its own challenges, and we seek to engage in constructive dialogue with the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and other participating States to address any concerns. We again praise the efforts of the RFOM and her team as they continue to offer unbiased, principled advice to OSCE participating States. We strongly support your work and execution of your mandate.