



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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**Statement in response to the report by Mr. Harlem Desir,
the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1163rd meeting of the Permanent Council,
9 November 2017

Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the first appearance at the Permanent Council of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, and thank him for his report on media related issues across the OSCE region.

Ukraine recognizes the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, and free, independent and pluralistic media as a core element of democracy. We believe that free media and professional journalism play a decisive role in the processes of democratic transformation in Ukraine. We note that since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 Ukraine moved 25 points up in the World Press Freedom ranking, which inspires us to continue work towards further strengthening media freedom in our country.

In this respect we wish to express high appreciation of our close cooperation with Mr. Désir and his predecessor on the post of the OSCE RFoM, Ms. Mijatović, 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.

We note a fruitful visit of the RFoM to Kyiv on 20 October, when a wide range of media issues was discussed. In particular, the Ukrainian side seized that opportunity to update the RFoM on progress in investigating the incidents involving journalists in Ukraine, including those mentioned in the Representative's report.

Mr. Chairman,

Numerous challenges facing the media and journalists in the temporary occupied territories of Ukraine require constant attention by the RFoM.

The Russian aggression against my country undermines the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the entire OSCE space and poses significant threats to the freedom of expression, freedom of the media and safety of journalists in Ukraine.

While reiterating our full support for the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ukraine urges RFoM to continue its monitoring of the media situation in the illegally occupied Crimea and parts of Donbas.

The violence against journalists and severe restrictions on media freedom became common features in these Russia-occupied territories, where journalists are threatened and kidnapped, free media outlets get censored and banned and where crimes remain without due investigation.

While all independent media were forced to close and to leave the conflict-affected regions, these temporary occupied territories have become targets of the forceful Russian state propaganda, inciting hatred towards Ukrainians to justify Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

We strongly condemn such actions, which contravene numerous OSCE principles and commitments, including the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1994 Budapest Document and the 2002 Porto Document.

Whereas the OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security, Russia has a comprehensive approach to aggression, using state media and propaganda as a warfare against Ukraine and against other democratic societies. As aptly noted by the Czech expert in response to the invitation from the Russian First Channel to take part in a political TV programme: "No. Russian First Channel is not journalism, but part of the Russian armed forces".

We commend the efforts of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media aimed at countering "fake news", disinformation and propaganda, including through the signing the Joint declaration of the freedom of the media rapporteurs. We are convinced that the OSCE commitments must be further developed to counter "fake news", disinformation and propaganda which stifle free and pluralistic media. We must not accept the view that disinformation is an alternative opinion.

Mr. Désir,

Cases of Ukrainian journalists Mykola Semena, who received a suspended sentence by the occupation "court" in Crimea and was banned from profession, and Stanislav Asieiev (Vasin), kidnapped by the Russian militants in Donetsk, must remain in the constant focus until both are in safety with their professional rights being fully guaranteed.

We are deeply concerned over the ongoing ungrounded detention of the Ukrainian citizen and journalist Roman Sushchenko in Moscow on trumped-up charges of "espionage". Roman Sushchenko's only guilt is that he is a Ukrainian journalist and a defender of the freedom of speech, known for his exposure of Russia's illegal actions against Ukraine.

Many international media organizations, including the International and European Federation of Journalists, the European Alliance of News Agencies and Reporters without Borders have called on Russia to free the Ukrainian reporter.

We call on the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to use all available instruments to facilitate his immediate release as well as to remain fully seized of the issues threatening freedom of the media and expression in Russia.

Last week we had a debate in the Permanent Council on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Among 57 OSCE participating States there is one single state – the Russian Federation that features in the 2017 Global Impunity Index, titled “Getting away with murder” and prepared by an independent and authoritative NGO “The Committee to Protect Journalists”. The Index includes 12 countries world-wide and is based on thorough examination of the record of the countries in the last ten years. The very fact that Russia was included in this infamous Index warrants a special attention of the RFoM to the situation in this country.

At last week’s debate the participating States condemned the brutal attack on the Russian journalist T.Felgengauer of the “Echo of Moscow”, which took place on 23 October 2017. According to A.Venediktov, Editor-in-Chief of the “Echo of Moscow”, 12 days before the attack the Russian state television company VGTRK ran a programme specifically targeting this radio station, it lasted less than seven minutes and contained 17 instances of lies, i.e. one lie every 23 seconds. This can serve as another example, among many, how disinformation and fakes on the Russian state television incite hatred and radicalization leading to tragic consequences. This situation is well familiar to Ukraine as a victim of Russia’s aggression. Significant restrictions of media freedom and freedom of expression in Russia together with Russian state propaganda create the breeding ground for state-sponsored generation of “enemies” and aggression, stemming from the Russian Federation towards its neighbours and beyond.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, we wish success to Mr. Harlem Désir in defending the media freedom and implementing his mandate at the time of unprecedented challenges and transformations in the media realm.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.