



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

PC.DEL/304/17
9 March 2017

ENGLISH only

Statement in response to the report by Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

As for delivery by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1136th meeting of the Permanent Council,
9 March 2017

Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatović, back to the Permanent Council and thank her for the presentation on media related issues across the OSCE region, her last one in this post.

Ukraine recognizes the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, and of free, independent and pluralistic media as a core element of democracy. We wish to express high appreciation of our close cooperation with Ms. Mijatović in addressing a variety of issues related to the implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments.

The Ukrainian authorities have always given serious attention to all issues raised by Ms. Dunja Mijatović in her reports and takes consistent measures on a national level with a view to further enhancing freedom of the media and strengthening the safety of journalists in line with the OSCE commitments.

We welcome the recent visit of Ms. Dunja Mijatović to Ukraine in February, her participation in the international conference “Safety of Journalists: An Imperative for Free Media, Freedom of Expression and Public Order” organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine together with the OSCE, as well as other international organizations and national media associations in Kyiv.

We thank Ms. Mijatović for her constant attention to numerous challenges facing the media and journalists in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

The Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, illegally occupied by Russia and certain areas of Donbas, where the hybrid Russian forces imposed their de-facto control, experience severe restrictions on media freedom and clamp-down on free journalism, including harassment and violence against journalists. All independent media were forced to close and to leave the conflict-affected regions.

We are very concerned over the life and health of the Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena, who remains detained by the occupying authorities in Crimea under the trumped-up charges of “separatism”. We constantly urge the Russian occupation authorities to immediately release him and stop detention of journalists under fabricated charges.

We encourage the Office of the Representative on Media Freedom to continue to take all possible steps with a view to freeing the illegally detained journalists and media professionals, monitoring situation and protecting the rights of journalists in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and in the Donbas region of Ukraine.

Mr. Chairman,

As the country suffering from Russia's aggression we regularly emphasize serious concerns relation to significant restrictions of media freedom and freedom of expression in Russia as such that together with the state propaganda create the breeding ground for external aggression.

The respective concerns are regularly expressed by international NGOs. Amnesty International highlighted in its recently released 2016/2017 report that "restrictions on rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly increased". The report concludes that Russian "anti-extremism legislation continued to be used excessively in violation of the right to freedom of expression". 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.

Numerous facts testify to the dangers faced by journalists in Russia in the course of their work, while reaction to crimes against journalists remains largely inadequate. Let us recall just one example when exactly one year ago, on 9 March 2016, a group of Russian and foreign journalists was brutally attacked on the way from Ingushetia to Chechnya, their minibus was burned down. This case had been repeatedly raised in the Permanent Council, but the Russian delegation could not provide any meaningful update on the investigation.

We are deeply concerned over the on-going ungrounded detention of the Ukrainian citizen and journalist Roman Sushchenko in Moscow on trumped-up charges of "espionage". Roman Sushchenko suffers from being Ukrainian journalist and 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.

Mr. Chairman,

From the first days of its aggression against Ukraine the Russian Federation uses mass media as an instrument of the hybrid warfare. In this light we did not find surprising the recent revelation of the Russian Defense Minister S.Shoygu about the establishment within the Russian Army of the "forces of information operations" designed for "wise, effective and competent propaganda" and that "they have already proved their effectiveness".

Confronting blatant violations by Russia of the OSCE Helsinki Final Act principles and commitments, Ukraine will be guided by the interests of national security in defending itself from the Russian information attacks. The provisions of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights are clear in that regard.

We commend the efforts of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media aimed at countering “fake news”, disinformation and propaganda, including by launching 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.

Ms. Mijatović,

We take this opportunity to thank you for your professionalism, dedication and indeed tireless efforts, over the last seven years, in promoting across the OSCE area an environment where the media can work freely, effectively and without fear.

We commend, Ms. Mijatović, your leadership and persistence as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We look forward to continuing our close co-operation and wish you every success in all your future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.