



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement in response to the Report of Mr. Harlem Désir, 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 1203rd meeting of the Permanent Council,
22 November 2018

Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

At the outset I wish to reaffirm Ukraine's recognition of the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, and free, independent and pluralistic media as a core element of democracy.

The Government of Ukraine remains committed to further strengthening the environment for free media and continues to take consistent measures on a national level with a view to protecting freedom of expression and strengthening the safety of journalists in line with the OSCE commitments. We will continue our close co-operation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to support the efforts of the Ukrainian Government.

Mr. Chairman,

There are parts of Ukraine's territory where numerous and serious challenges confront the media and journalists and require constant attention by the RFoM. These are the parts of Ukraine illegally occupied by the Russian Federation.

Although the comprehensive monitoring and assessment of the human rights situation in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, are currently not possible due to the absence of permanent international presence in the Crimean peninsula, the available information received from human rights defenders and other reliable sources indicates drastic deterioration of media freedom and freedom of expression under the Russian occupation regime.

Repressive practices and severe curtailing of the freedoms of assembly, expression, association, access to information have had a devastating impact on the rights of all residents of Crimea, especially those who oppose or peacefully resist the illegal occupation.

The active use of Russia's legislation on counteracting extremism and separatism as a pretext to ban journalistic activities, as well as show trials of journalists and activists, who do not accept the occupation, have effectively completed the process of cleansing the Crimean information landscape from free expression.

According to human rights defenders, public officials and security agencies of the Russian occupation regime in the Crimean peninsula are openly reluctant to conduct investigations of the crimes committed against media representatives, violations of the rights of media workers are ignored. Russian legislation provides for a special punishment for those media that are considered by the court as so called "distributors of extremist materials".

In view of steady deterioration of situation in the temporarily occupied territories, Ukraine reiterates its call on the RFoM to use all assets at his disposal to closely monitor the situation there and use in full the mandate to react to glaring violations and repressive policies perpetrated by the Russian occupation authorities. In particular, we request to pay attention to activities of Russia's state agency "Rosfinmonitoring" which maintains the blacklist of those individuals and organizations, whom the Russian authorities label as "terrorists and extremists", and who are most vocal on issues of illegal occupation of Crimea in the mass media. Among them are, for example, the deputy chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis Ilmi Umerov, Ukrainian Crimean journalists Ganna Andriyevska, Andriy Klimenko and many others.

Dear Mr. Desir,

We attach significant importance to your statements and calls for immediate release of Ukrainian media professionals, who have been illegally detained by the Russian authorities.

Among them is the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov who ended in October his 145 days hunger strike in a protest against Russia's political persecutions and illegal occupation of Ukrainian Crimea. He ended the strike only to avoid being fed by force by the prison authorities. Acknowledging Oleg Sentsov's courage and resolve in opposing oppression, the European Parliament has recently awarded him with the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

Ukraine also calls for constant involvement into the fate of another Sakharov Prize winner – the Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena, who has been sentenced by Russia's occupation regime in Crimea to a 2.5-year suspended sentence on the trumped-up charges of "separatism". He is denied the possibility to leave for mainland Ukraine to receive the necessary medical treatment.

We rely on continuing RFoM's engagement in the case of Ukrainian journalist, blogger and author of Radio Donbas.Realii Stanislav Asieyev, who was kidnapped by the Russian fighters in Donetsk in early June last year. Access to him has been denied by the Russian occupation administration since then.

The case of Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko, who was sentenced by the Russian authorities to 12 years in prison on fabricated charges of "espionage",

represents one of the most terrifying and appalling examples of Russia's politically motivated persecutions of Ukrainian journalists.

We appreciate the RFoM's efforts so far and call for increasing attention to these unacceptable cases of persecution of the Ukrainian media representatives by the Russian authorities, using all available instruments to facilitate their immediate release.

Dear Representative,

Ukraine and the Ukrainian people continue to be the target of Russia's aggression and hybrid warfare which, alongside the military, political, economic and diplomatic aspects, includes a massive information component. Propaganda and disinformation campaign against Ukraine held by Russian state-controlled media is aimed at destroying peace and stability in Ukraine, at undermining public trust in democratic processes and structures and at weakening resistance to external aggression.

Russia intensively uses "fake news", disinformation and propaganda to incite hatred against Ukraine and Ukrainians, but also destabilize democratic societies. Russian authorities invest billions of rubles into the state-owned propaganda machinery aiming at domestic and foreign audiences. As Russia channels such enormous financial resources into its state propaganda, it is not surprising at all when the Russian Federation finds it "dangerous" that the international professional media community has decided to develop the indicators of trustworthiness of information.

In this context we encourage the Representative on Freedom of the Media to continue efforts, if necessary together with the CPC, of assisting interested participating States in developing effective instruments of response to "fake news", disinformation and propaganda, originating from abroad and posing a direct threat to national security, territorial integrity and public safety.

Finally, I use this opportunity to again express support for the Italian Chairmanship's efforts of bringing to adoption a focused Ministerial Council decision on safety of journalists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.