

**Speech on the occasion of the
High-level panel discussion
“Building resilience towards destructive information activities: freedom of expression as
contributor to information security”**

**Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine (Velyka Zhytomyrska St, 2, Kyiv)
Thursday, 15 July 2021 at 11.00**



OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Teresa Ribeiro

Your Excellency, First Deputy Foreign Minister Emine Dzhaparova

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for your kind invitation to address this high-level panel discussion about best practices on how to preserve freedom of expression and freedom of media, while protecting societies from the malicious influence of disinformation. This topic closely relates to my activities as the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the OSCE, the Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Unfortunately, due to the tight schedule of my visit to Ukraine, I will have no time to closely follow your forthcoming discussion, but I very much look forward to learning about its results.

The OSCE was created as – and remains – a security organization. It is founded on the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and on a shared understanding of a comprehensive framework for security in the region. All participating States of our Organization voluntarily agreed by consensus that such an approach to security encompasses the so-called “three dimensions of security”:

- 1) the politico-military dimension,
- (2) the economic and environmental, and
- (3) the human dimension.

With this, all signatories to the Helsinki Final Act, including as you know, all European states, the United States of America and Canada, recognized “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as one of the important principles guiding international relations, with a specific mention of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.”

This was a unique development. For the first time in modern history, the obligation to respect human rights was included as an explicit and integral element of a regional security framework – and an element of equal importance to politico-military measures and economic co-operation.

Within this security framework, my specific task and mandate as OSCE Representative on Media Freedom is “to advocate and promote full compliance [of the participating States] with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

When it comes to freedom of expression and free media, the topic of disinformation constitutes one of the most pressing challenges of our times. It is certainly not a new phenomenon: propaganda and disinformation are as old as are international relations.

Although an old phenomenon, these days, widespread, harmful propaganda and disinformation is more prevalent than ever facilitated by modern digital technologies. This deeply affects our nations, including by undermining society’s trust in the media institutions. The very same free media that we need for our democracies to thrive.

As OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media it is my task to ask questions and observe if and how national authorities and perhaps even courts, professional associations, and civil society in general address the dangerous effects of disinformation.

Being in Kyiv, I cannot but mention the work of the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine that relates to countering disinformation.

There is a multi-year project to support strengthening of media self-regulation mechanisms. Its focus is on enhancing ways media community can address violations of journalistic professional standards. The project includes efforts on raising awareness of journalists about self-regulatory tools and promoting dialogue platforms on standards.

Also, this year upon request from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, the Co-ordinator develops a media literacy online platform, which will store relevant information and training material on media literacy and train a pool of trainers to be able to train and inform public to think more critically about how they consume media in order to question misleading news.

It is with the aim of addressing threats posed by disinformation, that I started in May 2021, at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna, a series of expert roundtables, to stimulate a relevant debate on specific aspects of countering harmful disinformation while preserving media freedom.

So far, we have held two very successful of these meetings, one on international law and the policies of intergovernmental organizations on disinformation, and another one on media self-regulation.

We have several more roundtables in mind. My objective is to gather media freedom experts and the 57 OSCE participating States’ representatives to discuss thoroughly and openly how to cope with the challenges that disinformation poses to us, while fully respecting international standards on freedom of expression and media freedom. At the end of this process, me and my Office will distillate from these sessions practical recommendations. I see this as a shared responsibility of both my institution within the OSCE and every participating State of our Organization.

This includes Ukraine, one of the 57 States that make up our organization, whose commitments to the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN regarding freedom of expression and media freedom are not unique: they are equal to the commitments of all other States.

A Ukraine that looks for inspiration in European values and models should not compromise on the protection of human rights. Nor should it fall back to the use of “temporary” and “exceptional” measures or excessive limitations on media freedom.

I have no doubts that in Ukraine there are people who inspire, facilitate, fund and spread propaganda for wars of aggression or hate speech in an attempt to inspire violence and discrimination. I understand that both are crimes in Ukraine. Crimes that need to be dealt with by law-enforcement agencies that find the offenders and judged by courts – in a transparent and fair procedure, based on international judicial standards and legal provisions.

Most importantly for today’s discussion – it definitely should not be based on the Governments’ decision as to what is truth and what are lies – as such decisions always lead to unfair discrimination of media outlets and, in the end, to censorship. In addition, such a negative practice brings no sustainable solutions. In the modern digital world, it may just cause a viral interest in what is forbidden. Something that will always be satisfied through the back door.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the past several years, the OSCE participating States and intergovernmental organizations have developed preventive and remedial measures with regard to harmful disinformation.

I am sure that the authorities present here, as well as the newly born *Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security at the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine*, will apply those tools promoted in Europe. In order to ensure security in the information field, we also need to advocate for freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Any other route would compromise any society’s commitment to human rights and – probably more importantly in today’s context – undermine the comprehensive security approach that is at the heart of the work of the OSCE.

The first, and perhaps most important, step to take is to put the danger that disinformation entails on the agenda of every Ukrainian citizen. This should be followed by initiatives to strengthen a vibrant media landscape. That, I think, would be the best way forward to a safer and more secure society.

I am fully confident that Ukraine, with its strong commitment to democratic values, will find the right approach in coping with the challenges of disinformation.

I sincerely wish you full success on this road.

Thank you for attention.