



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Statement at the Permanent Council
(Review of Current Issues)

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I would like to draw your attention to most recent developments regarding freedom of the media in Ukraine. As the presidential election campaign is picking up speed, the incidents against independent media are increasing. These cases show a pattern of harassment towards non-governmental media, which is especially alarming in light of the upcoming elections in October.

The latest incident concerns STB TV channel. The bank accounts of STB were frozen on 26 August on request of the tax authorities motivated by alleged violations of existing tax laws. According to STB, the TV channel cannot submit the documents required by the tax authorities as these are held by eight other state controlling agencies. Unless STB regains access to its bank accounts, the channel will have to stop broadcasting. This is not the first incident against STB. In June, I have addressed President Kuchma concerning previous incidents against the channel, including theft, death threats, and assaults.

The other recent disturbing incident concerns four private TV and radio stations in Crimea (the all-Crimean station Chernomorskaya, and three regional stations: ITV in Simferopol, Ekran in Dzhankoy, and Kerch TV), which were shut down on 26 July. The reason given by authorities for closure is the use of unlicensed transmitters. However, as this is not an unusual operating procedure and as other state-owned companies are still using the transmitters, the grounds for closing down the television stations do not appear convincing.

In light of these and earlier reports indicating interference and sometimes even harassment and intimidation by the executive branch in the work of private media regarding their coverage of the upcoming elections, I have urged the Ukrainian Government, in a joint letter with the Director of ODIHR of 14 July, to take necessary steps to ensure that State officials at all levels understand their obligations with regard to freedom of the media.

In addition to this intervention, I have turned to the Ukrainian Government on several earlier occasions concerning problems encountered by the media. My Office has nevertheless yet to receive an official reply.