



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 26, 2015

The United States warmly welcomes OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your comprehensive, clear, and compelling report. With principled independence, you have faithfully fulfilled your important mandate at a time when independent journalists, both online and offline, have come under extraordinary pressure and, in some cases, even been physically attacked and killed just for doing their professional work.

Representative Mijatović, by defending journalists and freedom of expression, you and your team make important contributions to comprehensive security across the OSCE region. We urge all participating States in the region to avail themselves of the Office of the RFOM's assistance and expertise in addressing shortfalls in upholding our shared commitments. We, as participating States, also need to recognize that the budgetary constraints imposed on your office affect your ability to do all the work necessary to carry out your mandate. We urge other participating States to support your requested increases in the budget.

In your report you note a number of troubling trends in the OSCE region with regard to shrinking space for independent journalists, continued impunity for murders and other attacks on journalists and media workers, the use of propaganda to foment hatred, lack of media pluralism, and the introduction and implementation of laws designed to silence dissenting voices. Even ordinary citizens wishing to exercise their internationally recognized right to freedom of expression, online or via more traditional means, are under increasing threat in some participating States. Regrettably, despite your continuing efforts to assist participating States in meeting their OSCE commitments, these negative trends continue.

The Russian Federation continues to control most media outlets, directly or indirectly, and uses state media regulators as a de facto censorship board. We are also disturbed that the continued harassment of media NGOs, independent journalists, and bloggers critical of the government or its policies has had a chilling effect on the media's freedom of expression. We call on the Russian Federation to end the laws and practices that stifle freedom of expression and the free flow of news, information, and opinion.

In Ukraine's autonomous region of Crimea, Russian occupation authorities continue their intimidation campaign targeting independent journalists for detention and prosecution. Russian occupation authorities have silenced all independent Tatar media in Crimea, and have also banned most Ukrainian language programming, replacing content with Russian

programming. The United States reiterates its call for Russia to end its occupation of Crimea and return the peninsula to Ukraine.

The United States is also deeply concerned about the court case involving Rustavi 2 and its potential implications for media freedom, political pluralism, and judicial independence in Georgia. In a democratic society, critical opinions should be encouraged, not silenced.

In Turkey, we are troubled by a pattern of targeting media outlets and other organizations that are critical of the government, as well as arbitrary blocking of social media websites. Access to pluralistic media is essential for any democratic society.

We are troubled by expanding threats to the freedom of expression in Central Asia, where governments appear to be cracking down on critical reporting and individual expression, especially online. Kazakhstan's blocking of independent news portals, including the forced closure of ADAM magazine, and excessive fines for administrative missteps, seem designed to close the space for independent voices. Tajikistan's restrictions on access to news and social media sites should be lifted. We are disappointed in Turkmenistan's ongoing refusal to accredit members of the press, including RFE/RL, and in the government's ongoing harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary imprisonment of journalists. OSCE participating States in the region must reverse the trend of increasing restrictions on freedom of expression.

Representative Mijatović, we appreciate your efforts to focus attention on the serious problems concerning safety of female journalists. Your recommendations from the experts' meeting you hosted in September highlighted some concrete steps that participating States can take to strengthen efforts to protect female journalists. We also welcomed your cooperation and coordination with the OSCE Transnational Threats Department at the two-day conference in Bucharest focused on preserving freedom of expression by the media while developing effective policies to counter terrorism. We would welcome additional cross-dimensional cooperation between your office and others in the OSCE, as appropriate. Crackdowns on freedom of expression, including freedom of expression of the media, pose security risks to all.

We also welcome your office's work highlighting the negative consequences of propaganda to foment hatred, incitement to war, and promoting intolerance. Thank you for the non-paper which we will study carefully.

Finally, the United States encourages the current and future Chairmanships to continue robust discussions in the area of freedom of expression online and off. The importance of freedom of expression, including of the media, and the safety of journalists, cannot be understated; they are essential to any democratic, prosperous, and open society.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.