

Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine
Working session 1: Fundamental freedoms I, including: – Address by the OSCE
Representative on Freedom of the Media – Freedom of expression, free media
and information
(Warsaw, 21 September 2015)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Honourable guests,

The main reason for my speech is a brutal and cynical information war against Ukraine unleashed by Russia.

Journalists and Ukrainian media have become targets of Russia-backed terrorists.

The first thing Russian troops did after seizing Ukrainian government institutions and military bases in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol was to take over the local TV towers and cable operators' offices.

Russian military forces cut off all Ukrainian TV channels in Crimea prior to conducting the illegal and illegitimate plebiscite organized as a postscript to the annexation of the peninsula by the Russian Federation in grave violation of the norms and principles of international law. The same methods were used in the occupied territories of Donbas.

Russian media extensively use propaganda and disinformation in their everyday programs, and often resort to hate speech and incitement to violence. Thousands of Internet bots work for the Kremlin spreading lies. The intentional governmental abuses of journalists and media to incite hatred and violence, to justify aggression and condone terrorism run counter to a number of the OSCE principles and commitments. We are convinced that effective international measures must be developed to counter propaganda.

In the same time the violence against journalists became common in the occupied territories of Ukraine, which are not under control by the Ukrainian Government.

In 2014, there were 132 cases of journalists being beaten in Donbas and Crimea, according to the Independent Media union of Ukraine. This is unacceptable. Experts recorded 128 censorship acts, 115 impediments to legitimate professional activities, 78 kidnappings or unlawful detentions of journalists, 70 cases of threats and intimidation and 59 attacks on media offices. Over the year, more than 40 media representatives have been illegally detained, some for many months.

For the eight months of this year, 22 cases of violations of journalists' rights in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and 32 cases in the occupied Crimea have been recorded.

And right now, as I speak, the Ukrainian journalist Maria Varfolomeyeva from «Svobodny Reporter» remains in captivity in so-called “LNR”. She was captured by pro-Russian terrorists in January 2015, while exercising her journalistic activities. We call on the RFoM to closely follow this case and use all available instruments to facilitate the immediate release of Maria Varfolomeyeva.

Distinguished colleagues,

The violence against journalists – including murder, assault with serious injuries, and intimidation – continue to be committed by the Russia-backed militants in certain areas of Donbas.

The media freedom situation on the Crimean peninsula has seriously deteriorated since its illegal occupation by Russia and is marked by regular threats, assaults and harassment against those media, who are not considered loyal to the occupying authorities.

During the illegal occupation of Crimea and certain areas of Donbas by Russia and the militants it backs a total of 8 journalists have been killed.

Ukraine strongly condemns all attacks against journalists and calls on the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Dunja Mijatović to take all possible steps with a view to protecting the rights of Ukrainian and foreign journalists in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as in Donbas.

All those violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute a serious threat to national security and peace in Ukraine and need to receive an adequate response of international actors in line with the norms of international law.

Dear participants,

Let me conclude by reiterating Ukrainian Government’s strong commitment to further safeguard and promote media freedom and protection of journalists in the country in accordance with the relevant OSCE commitments and international standards, in particular the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Thank you for your attention.