



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in
Vienna

Statement in response to the Report of Mr. Harlem Désir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1248th meeting of the Permanent Council,
21 November 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

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. We believe that free media and professional journalism play a decisive role in the processes of democratic transformation in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian authorities have always given serious attention to the issues raised by Mr. Désir in his reports. The Government of Ukraine takes consistent measures with a view to further enhancing freedom of the media and strengthening the safety of journalists in line with the OSCE commitments.

Mr. Desir,

Media freedom in Ukraine is being under attack by the Russian Federation, which systematically perpetrates violations of the right to freedom of expression in the temporarily occupied Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Abduction, violence and harassment against journalists by the Russian occupation authorities have made these areas "no-go zones" for independent, critical and investigative journalism.

Fake information disseminated by the state-owned Russian mass media as well as discourse of Russian public officials based on hateful language are instigating inter-ethnic animosity and intolerance of all sorts. Minority representatives and certain groups are being frequently labeled by the media as 'disloyal' to Russia.

The active use of Russian legislation "on counteracting extremism and separatism" as a pretext to ban journalists activities, as well as show trials of journalists and activists disagreeing with the occupation of Crimea, have in fact completed the process of cleansing the Crimean information landscape of free expression.

Certain individuals, most actively speaking on Crimea-related topics in mass media, are even included in the list of terrorists and extremists. Among them are, Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis Ilmi Umerov, Ukrainian Crimean journalists Ganna Andriievska, Andriy Klimenko and many others.

Ukrainian media in Crimea are stripped of their licenses and replaced on air by Russian TV and radio channels. Independent journalists have been often accused of terrorism and extremism and subjected to unlawful criminal prosecution. Ukrainian media staff is being replaced with Russian journalists: the rate of reshuffling the media staff is around 50-90%, about a half of incoming personnel being recruited in Russian regions, making manipulation with media content much easier.

Ukrainian TV channels are switched off, access to over 60 Ukrainian websites in Crimea is blocked. Russia has illegally misappropriated 503 frequency acquisitions used by Ukrainian TV channels and radio stations for broadcasting in Crimea.

The consequences of this repressive practices have been duly registered by the UNESCO Director-General in his recent regular report on the situation in the temporarily occupied Crimea, delivered in October this year. This report is based on the updates from different international organization, included on the information provided by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Mr. Désir,

In view of steady deterioration of situation in the temporarily occupied territories, Ukraine reiterates its call on the RFoM to closely monitor the situation there in line with his mandate and react to glaring violations and repressive policies perpetrated by the Russian occupation authorities.

In particular, we request the RFoM to use in full his mandate to ensure the immediate release of the the civic journalists and streamers illegally detained in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, including Server Mustafayev, Nariman Memedinov and Remzi Bekirov, who had been charged on trumped-up charges on extremism.

We would also 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 2017. Since than any access to him by Ukrainian authorities has been denied by the Russian occupation administration.

Dear colleagues,

Ongoing Russian aggression and dire circumstances for the media in the occupied Crimea and conflict-affected areas of Donbas cannot be seen in isolation from the media freedom regress in Russia over years.

The Russian Federation remains one of the most dangerous places for journalists in the OSCE region with the highest number of journalists brutally attacked and killed. Propaganda and political repression over the past years have had a chilling effect on open and free discussion, which is exacerbated by growing state efforts to control expression, including in Internet.

After enacting on 1 November this year of new legislation on “providing secure and sustainable functioning” of the Internet the Russian government expanded its control on the freedom of expression and information online. Now the government can directly censor content or even turn Russia's internet into a closed system without telling the public what they are doing or why.

According to the Human Rights Watch, the law severely undermines protection of freedom of expression and privacy online and fails to meet international human rights standards. RFoM also raised his concern in this regard, highlighting the “risk of restrictions to access to information”.

We call on the RFoM to properly monitor and address the critical situation with journalist's unsafety and clamp-down on media freedom and pluralism in Russia in order to ensure compliance with the OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.