

HDIM Working session 2
Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of expression and address by the OSCE Representative on
Freedom of the Media

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Dear moderator,

Access to various types of media – from traditional print and audiovisual to contemporary of social media – constitutes an effective tool, in the hands of civil society for monitoring of politicians and government officials.

However, not all media is eager to act as voice of society. State-owned or state-controlled media, for example, have no incentives to fulfil its mission as an independent government watchdog. Dependence on the government funding and, in some instances, for permission to exist, renders state-owned and-state controlled media akin to public relations firms, rather than free media in the traditional sense of the term.

The role of state controlled media becomes particularly problematic in the context of wars and military conflicts. Governments, directly involved in such conflicts or having a stake in their outcomes, have incentives to use media, under their direct or indirect control, as means to achieve foreign policy goals, including blatant distortion of facts, hate speech and incitement of war. Such practices could be outright dangerous, by inciting hatred inside societies, complicating peace-making efforts and creating long-term animosity among ethnic, religious or other groups.

A number of convincing examples of perverse use of state controlled media in the context of military conflicts can be obtained by looking at the current events in and around Ukraine. Since the beginning of the conflict, Russian media (almost entirely state-owned or state-controlled) have reported a number of stories that have potential to excite extreme anti-Ukrainian passions and that have been proven, by International Human rights organizations, to be entirely baseless. For example, in July 2014 a Russian state-owned TV station *ORT* has reported about alleged crucifixion-style execution of a three year old child by Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine. This story was soon discredited as untrue, even by the Russian media. Its capacity to incite ethnic hatred, however, requires no elaboration. Today, we heard once again in our discussions the same type of one-sided accusations from representatives of Russian controlled-media against Ukraine and its society, which are 'enriched' by horrifying stories not based on verified facts.

Dangerous applications of state-owned or state-controlled media by politicians in the context of military conflict is by no means limited to one country or one conflict. Therefore, it is reasonable for national public regulators and international bodies to differentiate between the treatments of privately-owned media on the one hand and the state-owned and controlled media on the other.

I, thank you.