



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

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

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,  
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1191<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
5 July 2018

### **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 on the media related developments across the OSCE region.

We wish to underscore that Ukraine recognizes the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, and free, independent and pluralistic media as a core element of democracy. We believe that free media and professional journalism play a decisive role in the processes of democratic transformation in Ukraine.

Ukraine remains committed to further strengthening the environment for free media and continues to take consistent measures on a national level with a view to protecting freedom of expression and strengthening the safety of journalists in line with the OSCE commitments. We will continue our close co-operation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to support the efforts of the Ukrainian Government. We view it as an encouraging result that since the Revolution of Dignity of 2014 Ukraine raised by 26 positions in the World Press Freedom Index.

### **Mr. Chairperson,**

For Ukraine the biggest challenge to media freedom and security remains the continued Russian armed aggression against my country, where the aggressor exploits media as an instrument of its hybrid warfare. Effective responses to this unprecedented challenge were sought, in particular, at the expert conference, organized by the OSCE RFoM in Kyiv on 26 June on the issues of strengthening media freedom and pluralism in Ukraine during times of conflict in and around the country. The discussions amongst Ukrainian media professionals, civil society representatives and selected international experts were to contribute to a better understanding of how to combine measures of, on the one hand, effectively countering malicious and destabilising Russian intervention and, on the other hand, of strengthening the free media environment in the country.

The areas of utmost concern remain the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol and parts of Donbas, illegally occupied by the Russian Federation. These areas have been made by the occupation administrations “exclusion zones” for Ukrainian media outlets. The Ukrainian media has been eliminated and replaced by the Russian propaganda sources – both broadcast and printed.

From the very beginning of the illegal occupation of Crimea journalists have been among the main targets of attacks. They have been detained, beaten, dismissed from job and expelled from their places of residence. The most recent report of the UNHCR on the human rights situation in Ukraine for the period of 16 February to 15 May 2018, published on 20 June, again put a spotlight on repressive policies of the Russian occupation authorities in Crimea. In particular, Russia is called upon to refrain from criminalizing free speech and quash all penalties imposed on Crimean residents for expressing dissenting views, including regarding the status of Crimea.

We call upon the RFoM to constantly monitor the media situation in parts of Ukraine, illegally occupied by the Russian Federation, and use in full the mandate to react to glaring violations and repressive policies perpetrated by the Russian occupation authorities.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

We welcome the constant attention of the OSCE RFoM to the fate of Ukrainian media professionals, who have been placed in illegal detention by the Russian authorities on fabricated charges. We welcome a strong call by the RFoM on Russia to release immediately a Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, held in Russian captivity in a Russian Siberian prison camp, a Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko, held in Russian captivity in a Moscow prison, a Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena, restricted by Russia in his activities in illegally occupied Crimea, a Ukrainian journalist and blogger Stanislav Asieiev, held in Russian captivity in Russia-occupied part of Donbas.

The major challenge remains that Russia defies its international obligations and commitments and ignores the calls of the international community. Despite the arrangements made recently at the highest political level between Ukraine and Russia, the Ukrainian Ombudsperson Lyudmila Denisova spent two weeks in Russia and was not allowed to visit a single Ukrainian political prisoner. In particular, her requests for visits to Oleg Sentsov and Roman Sushchenko were denied.

We are convinced that it is necessary to maintain and step up politico-diplomatic pressure on Russia to make it release the Ukrainian citizens taken hostage by the Russian authorities. As Ukrainian media professionals are also among these political prisoners, we call on the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to actively pursue the efforts to achieve their immediate release and use all available instruments to that end.

**Dear colleagues,**

Ukraine consistently voices its deep concern over the situation with the freedom of expression and independent media in Russia and the significant departure of this participating State in the past years from implementation of respective OSCE

commitments. Russia's record proves the link between domestic limitation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and Russia's external aggression.

We note from the report of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that numerous issues raised in relation to media situation in Russia remain largely ignored by the Russian authorities. Moreover, what happens is further continuous degradation of environment for free media and free expression in the country, which is also exemplified by the current discussion of a new legislative initiative that could force individual journalists and bloggers register as "foreign agents".

We also note from the presented report that out of 18 letters, sent by the RFoM in reply to the correspondence received from the Russian authorities in the reporting period, 11 letters concerned Russia's allegations about Ukraine. We strongly encourage the RFoM not to let the Russian authorities impose their own political agenda on the activities of the OSCE Representative and divert attention from rapidly deteriorating media situation inside the Russian Federation and severe restrictions on freedom of expression.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The national legislation of Ukraine defines Russia as an aggressor-state and Ukraine continues to defend itself from the ongoing multi-faceted aggression. The Ukrainian people continue to suffer from the real information war conducted by the Russian state-controlled media and aimed at destroying peace and stability in Ukraine. The two individuals, mentioned today by the Russian Ambassador, belong to such media. They extensively use "fake news", disinformation and propaganda to incite hatred and violence, in particular in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Such flagrant abuses of journalists' ethics serve to justify aggression and breach numerous OSCE principles and commitments. We also witness the resolve of the Russian state propaganda to expand its outreach and poisonous impact on greater OSCE space.

Whereas the OSCE places focus on enhancing implementation of media freedom related OSCE commitments, it is necessary to give due account to the fact that the Russian military authorities have identified and conceptualized the use of information resources as one of the most effective types of weapon alongside "falsification of events and restricting the functioning of the media" as "the main component of hybrid warfare". In this light we encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to assist interested participating States in identifying effective tools to deflect disinformation and propaganda specifically designed by a foreign state with malicious intent and posing a direct threat to national security, territorial integrity and public safety.

In conclusion, we again thank the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for the presented report and wish him and his team success in the future work.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**