



Human Dimension Implementation Meeting OSCE 2018 Statement of the Open Dialog Foundation on the Working session 2 (specifically selected topic): Freedom of the Media

The Open Dialogue Foundation (ODF), monitors human rights and civil freedoms in the post-Soviet region. Media freedom represents a serious concern in countries like Moldova and Kazakhstan.

In Moldova, politicians hold grip over the media using them to spread disinformation and propaganda, targeting oppositionists, civil activists, human rights defenders, lawyers and other dissenting voices, such as Ana Ursachi¹ and Eduardo Rudenco². The monopolisation of media ownership and media market is a serious issue: as reported by monitoring organisations, independent media accounts for just 15% of total outlets in the country. Oligarch and influential politician Vlad Plahotniuc owns four of the five national TV stations (Publica TV, Prime TV, Canal 2TV and Canal 3TV), as well as three radio stations (Publica FM, MuzFM and Maestro FM). This poses serious restrictions on the Moldovan citizens' ability to access free, objective and independent information.

Restriction on the freedom of the media is also seen in the form of smear campaigns against Members of the European Parliament and international human rights NGOs (such as the ODF itself) as well as in the pressure exerted against journalists, who often face obstacles in exercising their profession: their access to information is restrained by authorities and they are subjected to various forms of intimidation, mostly through hate speech and especially via social networks.

Given the dangerous democratic backsliding in the country, the OSCE should ensure that media freedom and pluralism be guaranteed in Moldova, taking concrete actions against mass media monopolization.

In Kazakhstan, media freedom is extremely limited. Nazarbayev's regime has virtually got rid of several independent media outlets, while at the same time cracking down on other forms of exercise of the freedom of expression, carried out by citizens especially through social media platforms. Several journalists, bloggers and social media users have become the target of fabricated criminal cases aimed at discarding and discouraging any form of dissent. Recent cases of individuals incriminated, harassed, detained or otherwise punished for exercising their right to the freedom of expression include journalists Lukpan Akhmediarov and Yaroslav Golyshkin³, bloggers and civil activists Ardak Ashim⁴, who was subjected to the brutal practice of punitive psychiatric

¹ <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/7992.moldova-prosecution-of-counsel-ana-ursachi>; <https://www.protect-lawyers.com/en/lawyer/ana-ursachi-moldova-lawyer/>

² <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/8511.written-contribution-to-the-pace-report-the-case-for-drafting-a-european-convention-on-the-profession-of-lawyer>

³ Case included in ODF report: <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/8423.the-list-of-kazakhstani-political-prisoners-and-persons-subjected-to-politically-motivated-prosecution-by-kazakhstan>

⁴ Her case is included in the ODF's report: <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/8625.report-the-list-of-kazakhstani-political-prisoners-and-other-victims-of-politically-motivated-prosecution-updated>; Urgent Action issued by Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR5782982018ENGLISH.pdf>



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confinement, and Muratbek Tungishbayev⁵. The latter, a political prisoner, is currently detained in Kazakhstan, has lost sight from one eye and risks becoming blind.

We regret that OSCE media representative didn't condemn publicly the fact of political prosecution and harassment in Kazakhstan. We call on OSCE to ensure that the Kazakhstani authority implement their international obligations concerning freedom of the media and pluralism, improving the number of independent media outlets, as well as ensuring the safety of journalists, bloggers and social media users in the country.

Thank you for your attention.

⁵ <https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/8777.political-prisoner-muratbek-tungishbayev-goes-blind-in-one-eye-he-is-in-need-of-urgent-medical-help>; Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/27/kyrgyzstan-extradites-activist-risk-torture>