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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement
In Response to the Address of
Mr. Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
as delivered by Mr. Arman Hovhannisyan, Deputy Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Armenia at the 1273rd Meeting of the OSCE Permanent
Council
July 2, 2019

Mr. Chairman,

We warmly welcome Mr. Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his regular report. The report gives a comprehensive overview of his activities as well as reflects the overall situation related to the Freedom of the Media and Information in the OSCE area.

Free, independent and pluralistic media is essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. Freedom of the media and freedom of speech are one of Armenia's most important and notable achievements. Any issue related to the freedom of the media and fundamental rights and freedoms is a priority issue for the Government of Armenia.

Mr. Chairman,

The Infodemic that accompanies the Covid-19 pandemic is a real threat not only for democratic institutions but for public health and security as well. The dissemination of disinformation, fake news are among the major challenges that may create mistrust and scepticism towards actions taken by government institutions in their fight against Pandemic. However, we are strongly convinced that the fight against disinformation and fake news should be conducted through enhancing free and responsible media within the general framework of promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Moreover, the Government and respective agencies should play a proactive role in providing reliable and verifiable information to the public on issues that disturb social cohesion. The Government of Armenia is resolutely determined in maintaining and guaranteeing freedom of speech and expression, as well as the right to freely gather, store, use and disseminate information. of.

There are a number of issues that my delegation is consistently voicing. Those relate to the necessity of safeguarding the conditions for the free exercise by journalists of their professional duties without any limitation, restriction and fear to be blacklisted or punished. Embracing the OSCE region in its entirety, including the conflict zones necessitates from the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of

the Media. We also emphasize the valuable role of journalism and independent media in the process of reconciliation, building trust and preparing populations for peace. The mutual visits of media representatives from Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan to the region is a good case in point. Armenia considers this exchange as good opportunity to bridge differences and fight stereotyping.

Dear colleagues,

Almost each and every freedom and human right is anchored on the freedom of expression or at least is closely interconnected or mutually interdependent. Therefore, any action, be it positive or negative, taken by the Governments in this crucial area indicates the direction a particular society is heading to.

All relevant international documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights recognise the freedom of expression as an essential right and fundamental freedom. The OSCE Permanent Council was guided exactly with these considerations back in 1997 when adopting the decision on the establishment of the post of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Participating states attributed to the post of the RFoM certain instruments for the promotion of full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media.

Apparently, we were also cognizant that we are not going to be always happy with the interventions of RFoM, since we agreed that the RFoM will address serious problems caused by, inter alia, obstruction of media activities and unfavourable working conditions for journalists. And it is exactly within this context of cooperation and criticism that RFoM is supposed to assist the participating states in their continuing commitment to the furthering of free, independent and pluralistic media.

However, today we witness the opposite process. Instead of raising the national standards of the freedom of expression and media to at least closer to the acceptable level agreed and championed at the international level, we see how a state is importing its abysmal practices into this Organization.

It is high time to indicate, if we are seeking strong and credible or shaky and fearful institutions, without any ability to withstand the values we all agreed upon.

In conclusion, M.Desir, let me once again reiterate our strong support to you and to the conduct of your mandated activities.

Thank you.