

Opening Statement
by Ambassador, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent
Council Mr. Ihor Prokopchuk at 2013 OSCE Human Dimension
Seminar on Media Freedom Legal Framework
(13 May 2013, Warsaw)

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I would like to warmly welcome all of you at the 2013 OSCE Human Dimension Seminar on Media Freedom Legal Framework. I am pleased to note that the seminar attracted attention of a large number of representatives from governments, media, academia and civil society.

Ukraine is strongly committed to the principles and values of the OSCE and acknowledges the important role of this Organization in promoting and strengthening security and stability of the vast region from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

The 2013 Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship *has identified media freedom as one of its priorities for 2013*. We recognize the fundamental importance of freedom of expression, including the principles of diversity and pluralism, as a core element of democracy and an essential tool for the protection of all other rights.

Translating into reality the Astana Summit's call for the establishment of a security community requires continuous engagement, coordinated efforts and persistence in implementing our commitments. *Efficient implementation of the OSCE commitments in the area of media freedom remains an integral part of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security*. Observance of commitments by all participating States on human rights, democracy and the rule of law is placed at the top of the Ukrainian Chairmanship's agenda.

As we all know the OSCE participating States have agreed on numerous commitments on media freedom in the last four decades. Media freedom and the free flow of information were at the heart of 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Since then, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and, later, the OSCE, continued to build upon and expand the "acquis" of support for free media.

Notably, the important role played by free media in ensuring full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law has been recognized most recently by the heads of state and government of all participating States in the Astana Commemorative Declaration of 2010.

Moreover, in December last year in Dublin the participating States recognized that freedom of information and access to information foster openness and accountability in public policy and procurement, and enable civil society, including the media, to contribute to preventing and combating corruption, the financing of terrorism, and money-laundering and its predicate offences.

As we begin this seminar it is also worth recalling that the freedoms we shall discuss in this event constitute international obligations, enshrined in many legal instruments, such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Yet, we have to admit that the implementation of undertaken legal obligations and political commitments, and effective ensuring of these fundamental freedoms do not happen automatically. *In our view, it requires enforceable laws, international cooperation, open dialogue and sharing best practices among the participating States.*

Despite impressive development of international standards regarding the promotion and protection of freedom of expression over the last years by international bodies and civil society actors, *a number of challenges still exist in giving full effect to the right to freedom of expression*, including government control over the media, violence against journalists, criminal defamation, limits on the right to information, discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression. Apart from many traditional challenges, new challenges have arisen due to rapid technological and social developments.

Without properly addressing existing and potential challenges it is hardly possible to promote comprehensive security and, therefore, to build lasting peace and stability in the OSCE region. In our view, addressing these issues should remain high on the OSCE agenda.

Let me recall that on the World Press Freedom Day the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara

stressed the importance of the OSCE participating States' commitment to freedom of the media and their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression. *He also emphasized that all journalists and media workers need to work without fear, in security and safety.*

This call from the Chairman-in-Office rests on the commitments, set forth in particular in Budapest in 1994, where the participating States united to condemn all attacks on and harassment of journalists and endeavor to hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable.

A significant work in promoting the freedom of expression across the OSCE space is carried out on a daily basis by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. In particular, this relates to the safety of journalists, both online and offline, and combating impunity.

However, more needs to be done by all of us as there will be no free media unless safety of journalists is fully ensured.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

We live in an increasingly connected world where media performs on multiple platforms. In our view it is essential that the participating States come together to learn from one another how to develop a legislative basis most conducive to an open and pluralistic media environment which lies at the core of any functioning democracy.

Media freedom and the right to free expression have been discussed in many different contexts by different stakeholders from the very start of the process that gave life to this organization. *However, I would like to note that there have been very few events on media freedom within the OSCE, to which all participating States agreed by consensus. The Ukrainian Chairmanship considers that addressing the issue of legal framework (both international and national) to ensure media freedom would significantly contribute to strengthening the implementation of the OSCE commitments in this area.*

The Human Dimension Seminar provides an important platform for an exchange of views on key aspects of the rule of law framework for media freedom. The OSCE participating States and other

stakeholders will be able to share best practices and challenges in the area of media law and policy, as well as strategies for better enforcement and implementation of OSCE commitments on the national level.

Dear colleagues,

I wish all of the participants a stimulating and practical discussion and look forward to the recommendations that will emerge in the debates at this Seminar.

I also encourage you to attend the side events and use the more informal activities of this seminar for networking, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences.

I am confident that we shall all benefit from the inclusive dialogue on this important issue during the next three days.

In conclusion, let me extend my most sincere appreciation to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Representative on Freedom of the Media for excellent organization of this important event.

Thank you for your attention.