



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement
in response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Ms. Teresa Ribeiro

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1346th meeting of the Permanent Council,
25 November 2021

Madam Chairperson,

While aligning with the statement earlier delivered by the EU delegation, I would like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

Ukraine thanks the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Madam Teresa Ribeiro, for her comprehensive second regular report on the media related issues across the OSCE region.

Madam Representative,

Ukraine highly values close longstanding cooperation established with the institution you head now and we hope that with your help this meaningful dialogue would be further broadened and enhanced.

We welcome your in person visit to Ukraine on 14-16 July 2021 that provided an opportunity for a round of meetings and comprehensive discussions with government officials, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

Your participation in the high-level panel discussion “Building Resilience to Information Influence: Freedom of Speech as a Component of Information Security” during the visit is very much appreciated. The event was a part of Ukraine’s push for the intensification of the international community’s efforts to combat disinformation and hybrid warfare.

We very much welcome your initiative on organizing expert roundtable on disinformation and freedom of the media to be held on 7 December 2021 under the topic “Deepfake news: Artificial Intelligence and Disinformation as a multilateral policy challenge.”

Madam Representative,

We have carefully studied your report. Establishment of a holistic state policy to counter information threats, strengthening freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists, countering destructive propaganda and disinformation, remain among the priorities for the Government of Ukraine.

Taking into account the existing and emerging challenges several state institutions have been established in Ukraine to address such phenomena as propaganda and disinformation. Among them is the International Center for Countering Disinformation at the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine focusing its work on countering internal and external information threats, combating hostile propaganda, countering disinformation campaigns and manipulations with public opinion, creating an integrated system for assessing information threats and giving prompt response to them, etc.

With regard to your concerns outlined in the Report and related to applying sanctions that affect the work of media outlets and journalists, I wish to reaffirm that measures introduced in Ukraine are in no way directed against the journalists and their work, and by no means are an attack on freedom of speech.

The sanctions were introduced on the basis of irrefutable evidence, provided by the Security Service of Ukraine, that the TV channels that were forced off the air have been financed and guided on their editorial policy by Russia.

As I have already mentioned on several occasions, over the past few years the channels have been subject to severe criticism as the tools of the Russian hybrid warfare toolbox that are being used to undermine Ukraine's state and civil society institutions to provoke conflicts on political and other grounds, and to justify Russia's temporary occupation of Crimea and its armed aggression in Donbas. More than 20 warnings were issued to the channels by the media regulator in the field.

We reiterate that all measures to counter information aggression, including some temporarily measures regarding so-called media and journalists, are undertaken in line with the Ukrainian legislation and international standards in the field of human rights and rule of law, including those on the protection of national security and public order, enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Madam Representative,

Amidst all this, according to the Reporters without borders, Russia ranks 150th in the world press freedom index with its website-blocking, pressure on independent media, propaganda and vague laws used to imprison journalists and bloggers as well as laws giving authorities power to block websites (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) that have censored Russian state media content (according to the Human Rights Watch Report).

According to the Amnesty International, restrictions on freedom of expression, censorship of the Internet as well as harassment, prosecution and physical attacks on journalists, severe reprisals against opposition activists are under way.

Madam Representative,

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has a direct negative impact on media freedom and safety of journalists in the temporarily occupied Crimea and certain areas of Donbas.

Seven years of occupation of Crimean Peninsula led to the disappearance of independent media in Crimea, control over information flows by the occupying power and total propaganda by the Russian media.

Journalists have been and remain one of the main targets for attacks. They have been detained, deprived of their job and expelled from their native land. 12 journalists,

citizens of Ukraine, currently stay in prisons or under house arrest in Russia and in the temporarily occupied Crimea for political reasons. 10 of them are Crimean Tatar citizen journalists. They were persecuted in order to suppress any attempt to oppose legitimacy of occupation or spread the truth about the mass violations of human rights in Crimea.

Some of them, namely journalists of “Crimean Solidarity” and “Grani.ru” – Ayder Kadyrov and Nuri Abdurashitov - were detained in September at the FSB building while trying to enquire into the whereabouts of the Crimean Tatars detained before, and have been accused of administrative offence.

Some of them were subjected to torture to extract an incriminating testimony, like Vladyslav Yesypenko, a freelance journalist of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Ukrainian language Crimea Realities outlet, who was detained by FSB officers in March; Ukrainian journalist, writer and activist Stanislav Aseyev, who had spent 28 months in the illegal prison of “Izolyatsia” in Donetsk.

We would encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to give the necessary attention to these worrying trends and use all available tools to facilitate the release of Vladyslav Yesypenko and Crimean Tatar citizen journalists as well as take steps to urge Russia to fully comply with relevant OSCE commitments in the fields of freedom of the media, freedom of expression and the free flow of information.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion I would like to reaffirm that Ukraine stands ready for further constructive cooperation and open dialogue on the issues related to freedom of the media and once again thanks the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for her dedicated work and wish Madam Teresa Ribeiro all the best in her future important endeavors.

I thank you, Madam Chairperson.