



Intervention by Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 10

Fundamental Freedoms I, including Freedom of expression

Warsaw, September 17, 2018

From Censorship to „Freedom First“

I am Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, representing Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa.

The Annotated Agenda notes that freedom of expression includes the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority. Let me present our recommendations first.

BPE recommends:

- That Germany repeal the Netzwerk DG. This would restore freedom of speech.
- That pS remove all restrictions and barriers to the free flow of information to restore freedom of speech
- That OSCE pS return to the already present laws against harassment, etc., as so-called hate crimes are actually crimes against public morality, as defined by lawmakers.

If laws like the one in Germany stipulate that social media companies have to delete or lock "apparent" criminal offenses, such as libel, slander, defamation or incitement, freedom of speech becomes subject to arbitrary decisions of corporate entities.

The staff at such entities may share a posted opinion, or may – arbitrarily – deem it polemic or unobjective. But even **comments** are covered by freedom of speech. Today, even simple quips are no longer permitted. They are simply deleted, oftentimes without legal recourse. This is censorship, unaccountable censorship. Content-based restrictions – whether in a private conversations, online posts or in likes and comments on on Twitter or Facebook – are not compatible with the freedom to express one's opinion.

Censorship, as already practiced in Germany, is always and everywhere an attack on both human dignity and democracy. How can then silencing dissidents and political opponents be defending democracy?

Increasing numbers of critics and political opponents of government policies are -- silenced through censorship and criminal charges.

By jailing free speech offenders there are at least three such cases in Austria alone as well as Tommy Robinson in the UK – governments treat peaceful dissent, even if it may be distasteful as a threat.

It is worth noting that those silenced are often members of the political opposition, especially in Germany. Both Mrs Beatrix von Storch and Martin Sichert were censored for posts which included links to factual and reputable sources.

As Judge Clarence Thomas recently noted:

"If we can't debate hard issues honestly, with honor, with integrity, how do we keep a civil society?

Cartoonist Bosch Fawstin added: "Truth-tellers are treated as if they're terrorists, truth is seen as the worst thing one can possibly utter."

Let us switch from censorship to a "Freedom First" approach, both online and offline.

Thank you very much.