



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 23, 2023

Representative Ribeiro, dear Teresa, the United States warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your thorough report today and your tireless efforts to defend and enhance media freedom in the OSCE region. Your work is a crucial pillar of our common efforts to enhance democratic governance by strengthening the independence of the media and ensuring journalists and media workers have the ability to hold participating States to account. You are absolutely right: “There can be no security without media freedom.”

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and are pillars of American democracy. Without respect for freedom of expression and media freedom, democracies crumble. In countries where political power is unchecked by a free press, where independent or dissenting voices are muzzled, human rights and human security are at risk.

In marking the International Day to End Impunity and Crimes Against Journalists, the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists reminded the Permanent Council that media workers in the OSCE region continue to be subjected to threats, abuse, increased violence, and harassment in the digital sphere. Of particular concern are the growing threats and harassment of female journalists, who are disproportionately at risk, and particularly by online actors.

Nowhere is media freedom in the OSCE region under greater threat than in the Russian Federation and in the parts of Ukraine that Russia has illegally occupied. Since the beginning of Russia’s brutal war against Ukraine, the Kremlin has dramatically intensified its efforts to silence independent reporting in Russia through censorship, restrictive licensing requirements, closure of independent media organizations, banning foreign media, and arresting and imprisoning journalists on fabricated or politically motivated charges, such as “discrediting” Russia’s military, extremism, or treason. Russia’s efforts to restrict media freedom include the March 2023 arrest on absolutely spurious charges of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who remains wrongfully detained in Russia. We call for his immediate release.

In 2023, the Russian Federation further fell to 164 out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders has observed that, since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, almost all independent media in Russia have been banned, blocked, and/or declared “foreign agents” or “undesirable organizations.”

Just last week, on November 18, Russia's justice ministry designated *The Moscow Times*, an English and Russian-language online newspaper, as a "foreign agent." This designation requires media outlets and designated journalists to place a disclaimer on items they publish and imposes strict financial reporting and self-disclosure requirements.

Russia is by no means the only participating State about which we have serious concerns regarding media freedom conditions and the safety of journalists as well as their family members. The Lukashenka regime in Belarus unrelentingly pressures independent media and journalists and has detained dozens of journalists and bloggers simply for doing their work. The regime unjustly sentenced RFE/RL consultant Ihar Losik and freelance journalist Andrei Kuznechyk to 15 years in prison, and also sentenced Ihor's wife Darya to two years in prison for her interview with independent media about her husband's condition in prison.

Colleagues, no threat or use of violence against journalists should ever be tolerated and all such cases should be investigated and, if appropriate, prosecuted. This is just simply unacceptable. To this end, the United States will soon fund an extra-budgetary project focusing on the safety of journalists and assisting OSCE participating States in the fulfillment of OSCE commitments outlined in the December 2018 Ministerial Council decision on the Safety of Journalists. This project will help participating States improve their legal frameworks and national strategies for the protection of journalists.

In conclusion, the United States fully supports the autonomous mandate and work of the Representative on Freedom of Media and fully supports an extension of the Representative's mandate. Her accomplishments prove the OSCE is a valuable and constructive partner for participating States in our common effort to uphold freedom of expression, media freedom, the safety of journalists, and access to information. And we remain fully committed to helping you, dear Teresa, in that work moving forward.

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