



## **Dr. Mehmet Sevki Kulkuloglu**

**Vice-Chair of the OSCE PA's Committee on Democracy, Human Rights, and Humanitarian**

**Questions**

**Statement for Working Session 2: Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression**

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Warsaw

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends and colleagues,

Distinguished guests,

As Vice-Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, it is a pleasure to be with you here today.

Just under a year ago I addressed the Human Dimension Committee in Vienna to express the PA's support for the draft decision on Protection of Journalists in the OSCE region. I noted then that the OSCE PA has adopted several recent resolutions pertaining to freedom of expression during its Annual Sessions, including 2013's Resolution on Freedom of Media – notably passed without a

single dissenting vote. It was particularly disappointing then that participating States were unable to reach a consensus on this draft decision during last year's Ministerial Council.

As recent events across the OSCE region illustrate, the issue remains no less topical. As part of a broader diminishing of democratic space, we have witnessed journalists being increasingly subjected to intimidation, imprisonment and violence. These actions have frequently been rationalized in the name of "security" or as a means to combat "foreign influence." Such behavior is entirely without merit. In times of tension it is *especially* vital that we abide by our commitments and principles. If we cannot do so when it is most difficult, we undermine their foundation and open the door to their arbitrary application – a slippery slope toward the persecution of minority opinions and ideas. History has demonstrated that this path, once pursued, is immensely difficult to return from.

This lesson is equally applicable to my home country of Turkey, whose experience with these issues contains many lessons for others within the OSCE. Attempting to stifle opposition voices is not a recipe for democratic development – on the contrary, it fosters mistrust and disaffectedness while damaging the citizenry's faith in their institutions. It is therefore important for the governmental side to bear in mind the total cost exacted when enacting or tacitly endorsing these regressive and anti-democratic policies.

Another example of flagrant violation of freedom of speech and persecution of journalists, bloggers is the treatment by Ukrainian authorities. It is specifically of

paramount importance that the governments pay even more attention to the right of freedom of speech in conflict zones. If we want to see the end of violence in Ukraine, the guarantee of freedom of speech is the important component of such peace efforts.

It is in this context that I appeal for the immediate end of all such practices. Participating States must make a firm commitment to prevent the erosion of media freedom and the culture of impunity that has led to journalists being threatened, abducted or killed. Furthermore, I urgently call for the release, without delay, of all journalists who have been imprisoned for having done nothing more than carry out their profession.

It is my hope that the protection of journalists and media freedom is again on the agenda for the Ministerial Council. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's many resolutions on the subject could serve as a departure point for the dialogue.

I thank you for your attention.