

SESSION 4 MEDIA FREEDOM

Wednesday, 25 September 2013

The Swedish OSCE Network, OLOF KLEBERG

(full version, somewhat shorter in session)

Free media, responsible in ethics but independent from power, is a backbone of democracy. But free media cannot exist without safeguards. Citizens must not only be able to rely on what media are reporting. They must also be assured by law to inform media - on failures, corruption and assaults. Without interference of state or employers, of course.

On their side, media must by law be guaranteed to keep their sources secret. This is a necessary system of mutually strengthening padlocks.

Moreover, journalists must have a protection by law in order to fulfill their professional duties.

Unfortunately, we see these padlocks being weakened or non-existing in many participating OSCE states. The situation is even aggravated in countries as Russia, Belarus, Azerbaidzhan or Kazakhstan.

However, let us not forget internet freedom for individuals.

Thanks to the brave whistle-blower Edward Snowden, we have during the last months understood that the United States has developed a global, detailed system of mass surveillance of citizens electronic communications.

The big internet companies, such as Facebook, Google and Microsoft, have cooperated with the US authorities to reveal secrets of private persons. The US authorities have even succeeded in weakening the internationally agreed rules of encryption.

Especially the United Kingdom, but also Canada, has assisted in this undermining activity.

UK authorities have moreover seriously violated elementary rules of Press Freedom by intruding into the premises of the newspaper The Guardian and forcing its editor-in-chief to destroy important files.

Regrettably, my own country, Sweden, has also substantially contributed to the unacceptable spying on individuals. Sweden has intercepted electronic communication in cables under the Baltic Sea – from East European countries, including Russia.

We all know that states are eavesdropping and intercepting. We might accept that from a security point of view. But if so, only under very strict control by democratic institutions.

Mass surveillance is not acceptable in any society – not in countries who signed the Paris Charter and certainly not in open, democratic societies.