



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

## **Statement in response to the Report of Mr. Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbalyuk,  
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1234<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
4 July 2019

**Madam Chairperson,**

We welcome the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, back to the Permanent Council and thank him for presentation of the comprehensive report on media related issues across the OSCE region.

We wish to express high appreciation of our close cooperation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in addressing a variety of issues related to freedom and pluralistic media in Ukraine as well as support of my country in implementing relevant OSCE commitments.

Ukraine considers seriously all the issues and cases raised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in his reports and takes consistent measures on a national level with a view to protecting freedom of expression and strengthening the safety of journalists in line with the OSCE commitments.

Taking into account that a number of delegations raised the issue of Mr. Vadym Komarov, journalist from the city of Cherkasy, let me provide you with some details on this case. The government puts a lot of efforts to investigate this case, which is now considered as intentional murder. The special group of investigators, reinforced by experts from the capital, under leadership of First Deputy Head of National police – Head of criminal police Vyacheslav Ambroskin has been established. The Head of National police Serhii Knyazev assured that the police will put maximum efforts in order to successfully investigate this criminal case. What is also important that police in its professional activities is closely cooperating with journalists in order to identify suspected persons as soon as possible.

At the same time, there are parts of Ukraine's territory, illegally occupied by the Russian Federation, where numerous challenges confront the media and journalists require constant attention by the RFoM.

The temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol and parts of Donbas experience severe restrictions on media freedom and clamp-down on free journalism, including harassment and violence against

journalists. All independent media were forced to close and to leave the conflict affected regions.

The Russian occupation administration restricts freedom of speech and free access to information in Crimea. Independent outlets were forcibly shut down, transmissions of Ukrainian radio and television were replaced with broadcasts from Russia, access to a number of local and Ukrainian media outlets via the internet was blocked for users on the peninsula, and independent journalists fled Crimea to escape harassment, violence, and arrests.

The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine reports that there has been mounting pressure on public journalism in occupied Crimea. These claims are confirmed by numerous reports of the international organizations, including the OSCE RFOM H.Désir, who condemned “the continued deterioration of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists on the peninsula” and underscored the unacceptability of “the practice of silencing critical voices in Crimea”.

On 28 March we witnessed the launch of a new wave of persecutions in Crimea. Among over twenty Crimean Tatars, who were detained under the trumped-up charges of extremism, are human rights defenders and civic journalists Remzi Bekirov, Osman Arifmemetov, and Rustem Sheikhaliev. They so far remained the only source of objective information regarding the searches, trials, and other violations of human rights on the Crimean peninsula.

In view of steady deterioration of situation in the temporarily occupied territories, Ukraine reiterates its call on the RFoM to use all assets at his disposal to closely monitor the situation there and use in full his mandate to react to glaring violations and repressive policies perpetrated by the Russian occupying power.

We urge the Representative on Freedom of the Media to keep close eye on the fate of citizen journalists illegally detained in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. We would also call on the RFoM to closely follow the cases of the Crimean Solidarity activists and bloggers Server Mustafayev and Nariman Memedinov, who had been charged with participating in the activities of the group Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Russia.

**Dear Mr. Desir,**

We attach significant importance to your statements and calls for immediate release of Ukrainian media professionals, who have been illegally detained by the Russian authorities. Among them is the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov who kept his 145 days hunger strike in a protest against Russia’s political persecutions and illegal occupation of Ukrainian Crimea. He ended the strike in October last year only to avoid being fed by force by the prison authorities.

Ukraine also calls for constant involvement into the fate of another Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena, who has been sentenced by Russia’s occupation regime in Crimea to a 2.5-year suspended sentence on the trumped-up charges of “separatism”.

Mykola Semena is denied the possibility to leave for mainland Ukraine to receive the necessary medical treatment.

We rely on continuing RFoM's engagement in the case of Ukrainian journalist, blogger and author of Radio Donbas.Realii Stanislav Asieyev, who was kidnapped by the Russian fighters in Donetsk in early June 2017. Access to him has been denied by the Russian occupation administration since then.

The case of Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko, who was sentenced by the Russian authorities to 12 years in prison on fabricated charges of "espionage", represents one of the most terrifying and appalling examples of Russia's politically motivated persecutions of Ukrainian journalists.

We appreciate the RFoM's efforts so far and call for increasing attention to these unacceptable cases of persecution of the Ukrainian media representatives by the Russian authorities, using all available instruments to facilitate their immediate release.

**Dear colleagues,**

The people in Ukraine continue to suffer from the real information war conducted by the Russian state-controlled media and aimed at destroying peace and stability in Ukraine. Russia extensively use "fake news", disinformation and propaganda to incite hatred and violence, in particular in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Such flagrant abuses of journalists' ethics serve to justify aggression and breach numerous OSCE principles and commitments.

Whereas the OSCE places focus on enhancing implementation of media freedom related OSCE commitments, it is necessary to give due account to the fact that the Russian military authorities have identified and conceptualized the use of information resources as one of the most effective types of weapon alongside "falsification of events and restricting the functioning of the media" as "the main component of hybrid warfare".

In this light we encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to assist interested participating States in identifying effective tools to deflect disinformation and propaganda specifically designed by a foreign state with malicious intent and posing a direct threat to national security, territorial integrity and public safety.

In conclusion, we again thank the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for the presented report and wish him and his team success in the future work.

**Thank you, Madam Chairperson.**