



United States Mission to the OSCE

Replies to the Russian Federation, U.K. and CiO on Media Freedom in the U.K.

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Our distinguished Russian colleague had in his initial statement said that some of the – I think the term used was “Western partners” – had not expressed opinions about this case. That is true, that we haven’t expressed concern about this case. And I thank our British colleague for answering a number of the questions raised by our distinguished Russian colleague.

But his second statement inspired me to comment on three things: first of all, the allegation that for some reason this case arises out of the BBC’s feeling threatened competitively by RT. I don’t believe that the idea that RT has overtaken the BBC as a source of news is accurate or true, but I also don’t think that it is at all reasonable to expect that the BBC would feel at all threatened by RT. They are actually a good illustration of the difference between state-controlled media and public service broadcasting. And they are actually competing in two very different activities: the BBC is probably the most respected public broadcaster in the world, and RT is a propaganda machine that is owned and controlled by the Russian state. So while BBC is competing at fencing, RT is competing at – I don’t know – clowning or something like that, they are two totally different activities.

Second, thanks to our colleague from the UK for explaining that although indeed the UK government has an equity stake in RBS – because of the financial crisis and because of its efforts to keep the financial system solvent through support for RBS which led to consolidation with Nat West. That, as we would expect in a democracy that operates by rule of law, that when governments are forced to subsidize banks or other large corporations they rarely take the control or any interest in managing the business practices of those companies. Rather they want them to run efficiently so that they can return that equity and return the cash that was used to subsidize them, or to support them, to the tax payers. So I appreciate our British colleague clarifying that RBS is not in fact government-controlled. But I can understand why our distinguished Russian colleague might raise that question, given that so many of the companies in Russia that are owned by, or have involvement with, the government do take orders from the Kremlin.

Third, I just wanted to comment that for any independent business, I think part of the challenge – and this expands much farther than the case in question – part of the challenge

with dealing with the Russian state, or its organs including RT, is the political risk inherent in dealing with a state that so wantonly violates the rules of the international system. And so it's understandable that any company, whether that's a bank or any other service provider, might have hesitations about the political risks that are involved in any kinds of dealings with the government of the Russian Federation or its organs including its propaganda organ RT.

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Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to just congratulate the Russia Federation. Four billion views on YouTube probably makes RT the most popular fake news site on YouTube these days. But I also just have in front of me the ratings for the UK for the last weeks. Remember, colleagues, just because this happens frequently where our distinguished Russian colleague tells us something, represents it as fact, represents it as truth in this forum, and then it's not true. So RT's ratings for the month of October in the UK are .06 – 0.6 – on a percentage scale of viewership, BBC's were 22.98, ITV 12.43. So we just heard from our distinguished Russian colleague that the BBC was being "outwatched" – that RT was having a better reach than the BBC – 0.6 to 22.98: that's a factor of more than a hundred.

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First, in response to our distinguished Russian colleague's regret that he's not able to have a conversation only with our distinguished colleague from the U.K., in the initial statement there were allegations made that the rest of us have been "asleep at the switch", so to speak, with regard to this case. So if there are going to be allegations that the rest of us have not been paying attention, I think the rest of us have reason to respond and let you know that we are paying attention.

Second, in response to our distinguished Russian colleague's question, he can find the ratings from the week of October 10th to 16th, or any other week in October or preceding months, at barb.co.uk. Those are available to him as well.

And third, in response to our distinguished colleague from the U.K. and you, Mr. Chair, I would say that the reason I called out the discrepancy between the facts and the statement of our distinguished Russian colleague is – as I've said before – that if we're to have honest dialogue in this forum, that dialogue should start with truth, not prevarication.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.