

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014

Statement of the Czech Republic on Freedom of Expression and the Media

Working Session 2: Fundamental Freedoms I

The Czech Republic aligns herself with the statement of the European Union.

Given our historical experience, we have always been a strong advocate of respect for the freedom of expression, independent media and free access to information. These freedoms are essential for the enjoyment of other human rights and fundamental freedoms and enable individuals to take part in the conduct of political and public affairs. One cannot overemphasize enough the importance of freedom of expression for democracy, rule of law, social inclusion and economic development.

The Czech Republic would like to echo the concerns expressed in the EU statement on the deterioration of the respect of freedom of expression in some participating States. In particular, we are alarmed by the recent attacks in the Russian Federation on journalists reporting on the situation in Eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, we were appalled by the cases of torture, killings and disappearances of journalists in Eastern Ukraine and continuing attempts to put pressure on the independent media in Crimea, as reported by the Representative on Freedom of the Media. We also note with particular concern the increasing trend of excessive regulation of the Internet as a means of political repression, restriction of journalists and other media actors as well as human rights defenders. We call on all the Participating States to respect the commitments made in the area of freedom of expression and the media, to refrain from any further actions preventing the journalists to do their work and to bring the perpetrators of the criminal acts to justice.

We would like to emphasize the importance of participation of the NGOs in our discussion. The civil society is and should remain an important partner in particular for the implementation of our commitments. The Czech Republic will continue to support civil society in promoting freedom of expression and advocacy against restrictive legislation shrinking the space for civil society. This is one of the commitments expressed in the recently approved EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline, to which the Czech Republic actively contributed.

As a tangible expression of the priority, we provided voluntary funds to the Open Journalism project and other activities of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Moreover, the Czech Republic prioritized the freedom of expression nationally, within its Transition Promotion Program. Currently 14 practical projects

are ongoing in the area of media in the total amount of 551 thousand EURO. Almost 40 percent of which are allocated to the support for independent media and access to information in Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in partnership with Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty further continued their support of talented journalists from Eastern Europe through Vaclav Havel Journalism Fellowships. For the first time this year, a new fellowship program inspired by Jiri Dienstbier's work in the fields of journalism, foreign policy and human rights was launched for a fellow from the Western Balkans.

The Czech Republic has also been active within multilateral fora. Last September, the UN Human Rights Council has unanimously adopted a resolution stressing the importance of equal political participation. This initiative, submitted by the Czech Republic together with a cross-regional group, has been cosponsored by 77 Member States of the United Nations. This resolution recognized that the right of everyone to freedom of expression is among the essential conditions for equal participation and must be protected. We would like to recall that the HRC also urged all States to ensure the right of everyone to freedom of expression as well as to facilitate equal and effective access to information, media and communication technologies in order to enable pluralistic debates fostering equal political participation. At the present 27th session of the HRC, the same cross-regional group is working on a follow-up resolution.

The Czech Republic considers as very important to safeguard fundamental freedoms in today's information society. In particular, we would like to emphasize the widest concept of freedom of speech. The existing internationally recognized principles and norms of human rights including freedom of speech and expression must be respected also on the Internet and social media, as confirmed by the HRC resolution 20/8 and reflected in our OSCE commitments. Any kind of censorship, hacking, preventive blocking and content filtering of the internet or social media are not acceptable from a human rights perspective.

To conclude, we would like to thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović for the work and reassure her of our continued support to her mandate. As other EU partners, we would like to invite the participating States to fully respect their international commitments and recommendations of the relevant multilateral fora.