

Warsaw, 22 September 2016

## **Freedom of the Media in Conflict Zones**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ensuring freedom of the media is the basis for the development of a society and, thus, the development of the state. State authorities must not only grant this right to the people, but also bear responsibility before the international community, since the media today are a means of receiving and transferring information, which knows no state borders. In the era of information revolution, it is not possible to imagine a democratic society where journalists and the media in general are being persecuted just because of expressing an opinion, which is not to the liking of the current authorities.

It is also very important to ensure freedom of the media in conflict zones, since journalists can convey the mood of the conflicting societies and thus contribute to a positive change in the general atmosphere.

Aware of this, freedom of the media is fully ensured in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite the fact that the current authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh, being unrecognized, are not under international monitoring. In this regard, I agree with the opening statement of the EU. An adequate reaction of the international community in this respect is very important.

Realization of the freedom of speech and of the media is also very important in dealing with intra-State conflicts, as a free-thinking society is capable of finding alternatives and various ways to effectively address problems through open discussion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From this perspective, the "blacklisting" practice used by the Azerbaijani government is extremely destructive. Individuals, including international independent journalists who visit Nagorno-Karabakh, appear in this list and are no longer allowed to visit Azerbaijan. I would like to draw your attention to a case, when Jutta Sommerbauer, a journalist working for a reputable Austrian news agency, was forced to return to Vienna after landing in Baku airport, because she had previously visited Nagorno-Karabakh. By the way, she arrived in Baku as part of a delegation headed by the Foreign Minister of Austria.

European countries and OSCE participating States, which have a huge positive experience, could help the Nagorno-Karabakh society develop more rapidly and efficiently their own free media. Using this opportunity, I would like to urge the OSCE, especially the current and future OSCE



chairmanships:

- to start practicing direct engagement of media representatives from de facto states in the OSCE area in various co-operation and development projects,
- to involve de facto states in international processes aimed at the promotion of democratic principles and norms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community, in turn, should assist in strengthening democratic societies in de facto states. We believe free media can help the development of our region and dramatically reduce the likelihood of resumption of armed conflicts.

Thank you for attention.