

Freedom of the Media, Session 2: **Dealing with Shadow Censorship**

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I am Henrik Ræder Clausen representing Wiener Akademikerbund, dedicated to freedom, non-aggression and a free marketplace of ideas.

After over ten years with alternative media, we are finding the situation more difficult than ever. Our hopes of a free and fair Internet are being dashed, and we are seeing a new “Shadow Censorship”, an unaccountable system worse than state censorship.

For example, the popular news site InfoWars was banned from several media platforms, without warning or specific justification. Many other independent analysts and news providers are suffering similar shutdowns. No legal mechanism effectively protects such emerging publishers.

Related, the so-called “Shadow banning”, technically permits publication of undesired material, but lets computer algorithms hide it from search results. This creates an illusion of a level playing field, yet in reality certain political views are automatically promoted, while others are put out of view.

Another problem is cutting funding sources. Removing advertising, deplatforming and closing of payment channels are now common practices against emerging media.

Robert Spencer, author and scholar on Islamic law and history, recently started a crowdfunding effort for a video studio. He was denied service from Patreon, MasterCard, and GoFundMe. Not due to violating any law, only due to be flagged as offensive by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

In the United States, which otherwise has powerful protection of free speech, this is a problem. Letting this organisation be a “Trusted flagger” of undesired content has granted it an undeserved gatekeeper role for Internet-based media.

Critics of government policy or other developments must now fear having their platform, their livelihood and many years of work erased by a few ‘strikes’ from unaccountable individuals employed by the platform providers.

We would expect governments and international bodies such as this to act in favour of freedom, to protect the pluralism in emerging media. Roads are free to use, independent of the drivers’ car, colour or political views. The Internet can be just as free, with limited, yet relevant regulation.

Wiener Akademikerbund therefore recommends:

- That social media platforms be legally to be treated as public areas, open to all.
- That censorship, if needed, is done by the state, not by unaccountable organisations.
- That OSCE establish a working group on protecting the rights of emerging media.