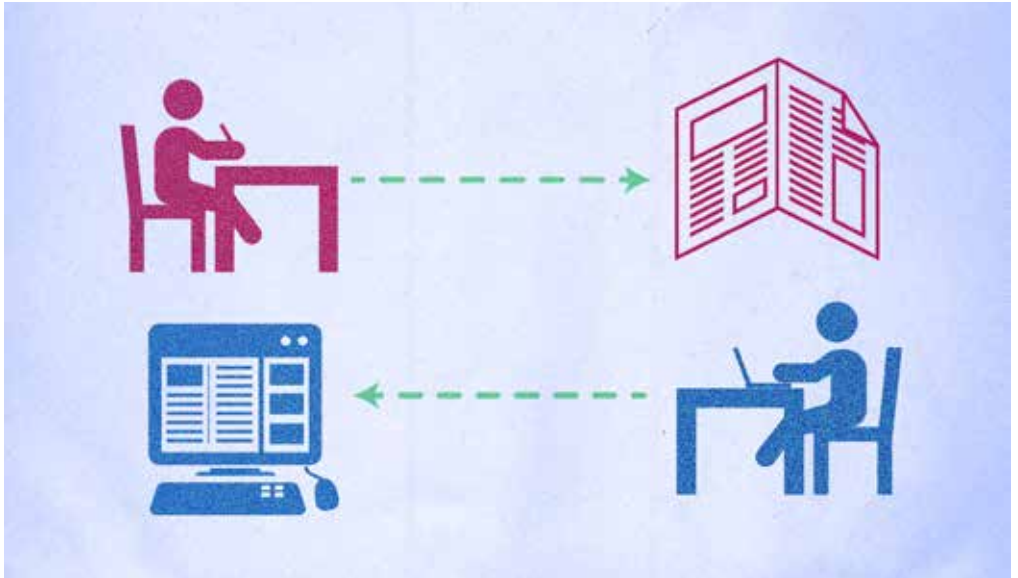


The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media



Defending free media online and offline



Free media and free expression, online and offline, are key to the very existence of democracy.

Free media is essential to a free and open society, no nation can develop democratically without free expression and the publication and distribution of ideas and opinions.

Democracies can function only when people are well informed and able to access and share information freely.

Journalists are an integral part of the foundation every democratic society is built on. They have an essential role as public watchdogs, providing us with information on issues that directly affect our lives.

In the digital age, free media is indispensable. New Media, using the Internet and fast-developing technologies, are dependent on the simple rule that the basic rights of free media and free expression are to be applied online as well as offline.

Protecting basic human rights

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is the world's only intergovernmental media watchdog.

To protect freedom of expression and freedom of the media, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media was established in 1997 by Permanent Council Decision No. 193. The Office is the world's only intergovernmental media watchdog. The current Representative, Harlem Désir, assumed his role in July 2017.

The Mandate

The Representative is mandated to observe media developments in all OSCE participating States and to advocate for and promote their full compliance in line with the Organization's principles and commitments on freedom of expression and free media. The Representative has an early warning function and provides rapid response to violations of freedom of expression and free media in the OSCE region.



Photo: Tina Rencelj/iStockphoto

It is the Representative's responsibility to address cases of obstruction of media activities and unfavorable working conditions for and protection of journalists. The Representative also works with participating States and other OSCE entities, including the Permanent Council, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities as well as international media associations, in defense of media freedom.

“ The objective [of the Office/Representative] is to strengthen the implementation of relevant OSCE principles and commitments as well as to improve the effectiveness of concerned action by the participating States based on their common values. ”

Mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Permanent Council Decision No. 193

Threats to media freedom

Media freedom throughout the OSCE region is under threat. The Representative's Office works to counteract this by serving as a media watchdog, monitoring threats to media freedom.



Violence against journalists

Violence, including murder, assault, intimidation and harassment, including online harassment of female journalists, continues to plague journalists, particularly those dealing with investigation.



Limiting free expression on the Internet

Free expression on the Internet has come under legislative attack across the OSCE region in the name of public decency and national security.



Criminal civil defamation

Criminal defamation laws that punish journalists for exposing wrongdoing and corruption are still in force and used in many OSCE participating States to deter the expression of dissenting viewpoints.



Restrictions on media pluralism

Attempts to restrict pluralism in broadcast, print and online media take various forms, ranging from preferential treatment of state-owned media to governmental pressure on broadcasters and outright closure of independent media outlets.



Anti-terrorism laws

Laws restricting free expression and criminalizing behavior arbitrarily identified as terrorist activity in the name of national security are being adopted across the OSCE region.



Access to information

Denial of access to information and documents by public and publicly funded entities thwarts authentic journalism and enables those entities to continue acting without oversight.



Release of confidential sources

Coercion to release confidential sources by law enforcement and judicial authorities strikes at the heart of journalists' ability to engage in investigative reporting.



Overreaching surveillance

Usually justified in the name of national security, the blanket retrieval of journalists' data by government authorities destroys the ability of media workers to maintain confidential sources.

How the Office operates

The Office's main task is acting on behalf of media in trouble.

The Representative's involvement can take various forms, ranging from behind-the-scenes "quiet diplomacy" and through contacts with the participating States' Foreign Ministers, to raising public awareness through press statements.

The Office provides thorough legal analyses of proposed and existing media laws in participating States. The Office prepares in-depth reports on substantive issues facing media.

For example, in 2012 the Office released the results of the first OSCE region-wide survey of laws and regulations affecting Internet freedom.

The Representative has taken the lead on raising awareness of the continued degradation of journalists' safety and speaks frequently on the topic.

The Office also provides helpful guides and resources for journalists and government officials on contemporary

issues. These include Media Freedom on the Internet (2016), New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists (2016), Propaganda and Freedom of the Media (2015), the Safety of Journalists Guidebook (2nd ed. 2014) and The Online Media Self-Regulation Guidebook (2013).

As well, the Representative and his staff conduct visits and publish reports on the media-freedom situation in participating States. These visits include consultations with high-ranking public officials, journalists and NGOs.



OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
Harlem Désir.

Photo: Quai d'Orsay/
Frédéric de La Mure

Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Harlem Désir was appointed the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in July 2017. He has had many years of public service including as the French Minister of State for European Affairs. Before assuming the role of Minister he was a Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2014. Désir served as Vice-President of the Socialist Group of the

European Parliament from 2004 to 2009 and as First Secretary of the French Socialist Party from 2012 to 2014. In addition to his extensive political experience, he is an expert on human rights and spent much of his career advocating for the rights of marginalized groups. In October 1984, Harlem Désir co-founded the French not-for-profit association "SOS Racisme", where he became a renowned activist, fighting against racism, anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination.

The Office's main activities

- Protecting journalists in cases of harassment, especially online harassment and threats of violence against female journalists and bloggers, incarceration and physical attack.
- Promoting pluralism in broadcast, print and new media.
- Promoting dialogue among journalists' associations.
- Providing resources to address the issues of propagandism and fake news.
- Promoting efforts to decriminalize defamation.
- Advocating media freedom on the Internet.
- Providing legal reviews to assist participating States in reforming media laws.
- Strengthening the role of public service broadcasters.
- Promoting self-regulation mechanisms.
- Promoting access to government-held information.
- Promoting journalists' right to keep sources confidential.
- Conducting regional media conferences in the South Caucasus, Central Asia and South East Europe.
- Countering incitement to terrorism and deliberate and violent hate speech while preserving freedom of expression.

Follow the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media



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