



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement in response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Madam Teresa Ribeiro

As for delivery by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1422nd meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
11 May 2022

Mr Chairperson,

Ukraine joins others in welcoming Madam Teresa Ribeiro and thanks her for presentation of the Regular Report to the Permanent Council.

Madam Representative,

We commend your efforts aimed at providing comprehensive picture of what is happening in the OSCE region with regard to media freedom and the safety of journalists.

We value your resolute position in condemnation of russia's war against Ukraine that along with terrorizing civilian population with drone and missile attacks, destroying critical infrastructure and residential buildings, has a direct detrimental impact on freedom of speech and media freedom in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

We commend a number of events organized by or in close cooperation with your Office during the reported period, including the first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Media Freedom as a Central Pillar of the Comprehensive Security, first Meeting of the National Focal Points of the Safety of Journalists Project, series of round tables within the Project.

Protection of freedom of speech and freedom of expression together with ensuring free and safe environment for journalists' work, promoting media pluralism, countering disinformation and propaganda and strengthening media literacy have always been integral components of Ukrainian policy.

Ukraine is taking measures aimed at strengthening its information front and bringing the Ukrainian media landscape to the European and international standards.

Even despite russia's war of aggression, according to the Reporters without Borders, Ukraine improved its position by 27 points in the press freedom rating.

Dear Madam Ribeiro,

As you rightly pointed out in your Report, russia's war has devastating consequences for the entire Ukrainian society and severe effects on the media situation in the country.

The ability of journalists and other media professionals to work safely in Ukraine has been gravely impeded for the second time in the last nine years after a new phase of russia's armed aggression against Ukraine began on 24 February 2022.

According to the Institute of Mass Information, during more than fourteen months of its full-scale invasion, russia has committed more than 500 crimes against journalists and media in Ukraine.

Ukraine fully echoes that safety of journalists must be guaranteed at all times and journalists must never be targets, when covering wars and conflicts.

However, over 50 journalists have been killed in Ukraine: nine were killed while reporting on or filming the situation on the ground, 13 were killed by tortures or russian shelling of Ukrainian cities; 30 died on the battlefield. The fate of several more remains unknown.

Among the recent tragic deaths of journalists in Ukraine is killing in the russian missile attack of French journalist Arman Soldin near Bakhmut. Killing of Ukrainian journalist Bohdan Bitik near Kherson and the injury of Italian journalist Corrado Zunino, who have become victims of russian snipers, is yet another war crime by russia.

The policy of persecution of freedom of speech and suppression of independent journalism has been part of russia's occupation strategy since the beginning of its aggression back in 2014.

Incredibly large number of the regional editorial offices in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine was forced to shut down due to constant threats to their staff members, destruction of their equipment and premises, and simply due to inability to work under severe repressions and occupation.

russia deliberately attempts to isolate people in the temporarily occupied territories from the Ukrainian information space by turning off radio and television signal, blocking the work of national Internet providers and mobile traffic and trying to replace it with its own propaganda channels.

Against this backdrop, together with our international partners Ukraine remains committed to further countering massive russian propaganda of war and hatred, disinformation campaigns and deliberate criminal manipulations with public opinion that the aggressor-state uses as an instrument of hybrid warfare against Ukraine.

Madam Representative, dear colleagues,

Targeted repressive campaign against residents of the temporarily occupied Crimea deserves particular attention.

The recent Report by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights "Crimean Tatars' struggle for human rights" provides examples of multiple violations of human rights against Crimean Tatars, including numerous restrictions on freedom of speech and media freedom.

With its harsh repressions the russian occupying authorities severely restricted media environment and barred independent journalism in Crimea.

That is why dozens of independent journalists under immense pressure and threat of being imprisoned or brutally murdered were forced to leave the peninsula. Under such circumstances, citizen journalists - ordinary residents of Crimea, who oppose the illegal occupation, started playing an active role in the process of collecting facts and reporting about deteriorating human rights situation and brutal attacks on freedom of speech.

Fifteen Crimean citizen journalists, members of Crimean Solidarity movement, are among those sentenced on the falsified charges and held behind bars in the temporarily occupied Crimea or in russia. The so-called investigations and trials over citizen journalists conducted by the russia's occupation authorities are accompanied by the numerous reports of physical and psychological pressure, obstruction of the right to legal defense, and neglecting the need for medical care.

I take this opportunity to thank you, Madam Representative, for spotlighting cases of threats, persecution and acts of violence against journalists and other media professionals, and for your attention to the fate of Crimean citizen journalists, including Amet Suleymanov who was forced into pre-trial detention in Simferopol despite his failing health, Iryna

Danylovykh who has been denied medical treatment while in prison, Osman Arifmemetov, Rustem Sheikhaliyev, Ruslan Suleymanov and many others who for their pro-Ukrainian position have extended the list of the regime's victims.

It is Ukraine's strong belief that atrocious human rights violations journalists and other media professionals are subjected to deserve publicity. Impunity for crimes against them should never be tolerated.

It is our common responsibility and obligation to ensure accountability for all crimes against free media and independent journalism committed by russia in Ukraine since 2014.

We believe that the RFoM Office should continue its efforts in identifying effective tools on how to handle censorship and countering disinformation and propaganda posing a direct threat to national security, territorial integrity, democratic processes and public safety.

The scale of propaganda at the state-run channels in russia has no limits, in particular no moral ones. russian propagandists continue brainwashing minds of the russian population to fuel hatred towards Ukrainians, justify murders of Ukrainians, abduction of Ukrainian children and other war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the regime. russian propagandists used the video footage showing a house destroyed by a missile in Uman, claiming that this was shelling of Donetsk by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. And it is not an isolated case. As we already stressed at the PC Meeting last week, such cases deserve special attention of the OSCE, including of the RFoM. Such flagrant violations of the OSCE principles and commitments undermine our common security and we call on the international community to increase pressure on russia and act without delay.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our full support for the autonomous mandate of the RFoM and the way it is fulfilled by Madam Representative. We reaffirm readiness for further constructive cooperation and open dialogue on the issues related to the safety of journalists and media freedom.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.