



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 13, 2024

Representative Ribeiro, dear Teresa, welcome back to the Permanent Council. As you deliver your final report as Representative on Freedom of the Media, let me once again thank you personally for your courage and applaud your dedication to promoting freedom of expression, safeguarding independent journalism, and advocating for the safety of journalists in the OSCE region.

Experience has shown that in places where media freedom is absent and people lack access to accurate information and a range of views, state power goes unchecked. This poses dangers not only to the people in the country concerned but also to international security. As you have so eloquently stated: "There can be no security without media freedom."

Madam Representative, the United States is grateful for your consistent and principled defense of journalistic freedom. We call for the release of all those incarcerated for carrying out their journalistic duties, including Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva who are among the dozens of media workers currently held in Russia. Journalism is not a crime, nor should it be a death sentence. Several dozen journalists and media workers have been killed or taken prisoner in the line of duty by Russia or its proxies since the beginning of Russia's senseless invasion of Ukraine in 2014. According to the Media Initiative for Human Rights, Russia has also taken at least 31 media workers from occupied areas of Ukraine. Their whereabouts and health are unknown.

In Belarus, the Lukashenka regime pressures independent media and journalists to limit access to information. This includes threatening journalists and their families with criminal prosecution and censorship.

Dear Teresa, thank you for engagement – as outlined in your report - with a broad range of participating States. Your advocacy clearly makes a difference on behalf of journalists and media workers throughout the OSCE space.

Like you, we continue to raise concern about foreign agents-style legislation and so-called "sovereignty protection" laws, particularly their impact on independent media. In Georgia, the Georgian Dream party's foreign agent legislation and rhetoric undermines its OSCE commitments, impedes independent media organizations working to provide Georgians with access to high-quality information, and risks derailing the country's European future. In Hungary, we are concerned about the Sovereignty Protection Law, which has had a chilling effect on democratic debate and has already been used to target local independent

media organizations and U.S. journalists. Likewise, in Central Asia, the limited media space in all five Central Asian countries remains restricted with growing pressure against independent press.

Madam Chair, the people in this room know truth from fiction. We see examples of both every Thursday. A vibrant, free, and independent media inspires critical thinking and is the shield that stands between the truth and its annihilation. Teresa, we salute your principled defense and advancement of media freedom in the OSCE region at a time when it has been under siege, and we will continue to support the vital work of your office.

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