



**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 delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1397<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

03 November 2022

**Mr Chairperson,**

Ukraine joins others in welcoming Representative on Freedom of the Media, Madam Teresa Ribeiro, back to the Permanent Council and thanks Madam Ribeiro for her Report.

As this year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the RFoM Mandate that is taking place almost to the day, on 5 November, we congratulate Madam Representative and reaffirm our full support for the Mandate and readiness for further constructive cooperation and open dialogue on the issues related to media freedom.

We completely agree that taking stock and reflecting on the lessons learned over the past 25 years is as relevant as ever and, in this regard, we welcome a number of events organized by the RFoM that gave an opportunity to flag important issues on existing and emerging challenges to media freedom and ways to defend freedom of expression throughout the OSCE region.

**Madam Representative,**

We very much value your resolute position in condemnation of russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We appreciate all RFoM's messages in social media, press releases and statements issued since 24 February 2022, including the latest one issued with ODIHR Director on categorically condemning russia's attempt to annex the territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine in violation of the peremptory norm of international law prohibiting the acquisition of territory by force.

russia has been waging its war against sovereign and independent Ukraine for more than eight months. Unable to win on the battlefield it resorts to terrorizing civilian population. Carrying out drone and missile attacks russia deliberately destroys critical infrastructure, including energy facilities, with the aim to freeze Ukrainians before coming winter, intimidate people and break their spirit.

All these barbaric actions are accompanied by a large-scale state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation campaign aimed at justifying russian war against Ukraine and distracting russians' attention from thoughts about inevitable defeat in the senseless war, new severe sanctions, lies about mobilization measures and real losses of the so-called "world's second" army.

**Madam Representative,**

As you rightly pointed out in your Report, it is deeply troubling that Russia continues to impose severe restrictions incompatible with the right to freedom of expression and media freedom. And all this is happening against the backdrop of war against Ukraine and a dramatic degradation in the intellectual level of all state institutions.

As emphasized in the latest Moscow Mechanism Report on the situation in Russia, the Russian legislation increasingly restricts the basic civil freedoms, freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly. It includes, inter alia, adoption of vague laws banning dissemination of information considered “unreliable” by the Russian authorities, banning the activity of foreign media that distribute their products in Russia, whenever the activity of a Russian media outlet in another country is banned or restricted, “foreign agent law” etc. Criminal liability is introduced for “discrediting” Russian armed forces. Any anti-war speech, offline or online, is severely persecuted by the Russian authorities.

State-controlled media are responsible for incitement to hatred with regard to other nations, in particular to the Ukrainian one. Russia has openly declared its desire to exterminate Ukrainians as a nation. Last week one of the Kremlin propagandists, “Russia Today” presenter, well-known for publicly calling for genocide of Ukrainians, elimination of Ukraine’s independence, and overthrow of its constitutional order, suggested “drowning or burning Ukrainian children in the hut”. A very telling example of genocide incitement, but not an isolated one.

Let me be clear, such remarks are not anymore about freedom of speech. They are about hate speech. Such crime must not go unnoticed and need our common adequate response. We once again call on all participating States that have not yet done so, to ban broadcaster “Russia Today” as it has nothing to do with freedom of speech.

I can also provide you with many more examples of absurd disinformation deliberately created and spread by the Russian propaganda machine, like accusing Ukraine of preparing a provocation with the use of a “dirty bomb”, or spreading mosquitoes infected with dangerous viruses, talks about the “desatanization” of Ukraine. And I can go on and on.

We commend efforts of our partners, who have already contributed to combating propaganda and fake news distribution on their territories, including by prohibition broadcasting of Kremlin-controlled propaganda outlets.

**Madam Ribeiro,**

2 November marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Ukraine strongly and unequivocally condemns all attacks against journalists and maintains a firm view that safety of journalists must be guaranteed at all times. We are fully aware of the fact that safety of journalists remains the biggest challenge to free media and freedom of expression as such.

We fully support your point that journalists and other media workers must never be targets, when covering wars and conflicts.

Regrettably, the Russian war has a direct detrimental impact on exercising by journalists and other media workers of their rights. Too many lives have already been lost.

In more than eight months of Russia’s full-scale war, according to the information available, 42 journalists were killed in Ukraine: 8 were killed while reporting or filming the situation on the ground, 13 were killed by Russian shelling or tortures; 21 died on the battlefield.

We remain concerned about the situation in the temporarily occupied Crimea.

For more than eight years Crimean residents, who oppose the occupation, including citizen journalists, human rights defenders and civic activists have been under constant persecution and threats. Since the beginning of the war more than 40 cases of their persecution for “discrediting” or “calling for obstruction” of Russian armed forces have been documented. Additional measures that have seriously restricted the right to freedom of expression and access to a range of sources of information have been imposed since 24 February 2022.

Currently twelve Crimean Tatar citizen journalists are serving sentences on trumped-up charges that are clearly linked to their work on reporting about repressions and other human rights violations under Russian occupation. In an attempt to break their will and spirit they are subjected to immense psychological pressure and physical pain that amount to torture. I also cannot but mention the case of RFE/RL – Crimea. Realities freelance correspondent Vladyslav Yesypenko, who was arrested, tortured and in February 2022 sentenced to six years in prison by the so-called “Simferopol District Court”, later his sentence was changed to five years, on falsified charges.

Such gross human rights violations must not remain silenced. We, therefore, very much support that safety of journalists remains one of your top priorities and encourage you to continue following the cases of journalists sentenced on trumped-up charges and very often subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

We welcome launching a new project on “Safety of Journalists”. Ukraine has made its contribution to the relevant thematic survey, nominated its National Focal Point and is ready to cooperate towards promoting safety of journalists in order they can perform their professional duties, in particular in such challenging times.

**Madam Ribeiro,**

Ukraine fully echoes your stance regarding the utmost importance to keep receiving reliable information from independent media sources.

We value your resolute position in condemning Russia’s blatant violations of its international obligations that pose a risk of a more severe censorship, shrinking media space and undue restrictions on the work of journalists. Expressing RFoM’s position on the events and your further engagement in line with your mandate in addressing severe consequences of Russia’s war against Ukraine is of utmost importance and makes a valuable contribution to the democracy, peace and joint security in the whole OSCE region.

We once again thank you, Madam Ribeiro, for your presentation and wish you every success in your responsible endeavors.

**Thank you, Mr Chairperson.**