



ԵԱՀԿ-ՈՒՄ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄՇՏԱԿԱՆ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՑՈՒՑՉՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ
PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement

**in Response to the Address of Ms. Teresa Ribeiro,
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan,
Permanent Representative of Armenia
at the 1313th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

13 May 2021

Madame Chairperson,

The Delegation of Armenia warmly welcomes Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, in her first appearance at the Permanent Council and thanks for the presentation of her report.

Free, independent and pluralistic media is essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of governance. Freedom of expression and media freedom are priorities for Armenia and the Armenian society and, therefore, are under constant attention and focus.

Madame Ribeiro,

Indeed, the *Infodemic*, which we all experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and which is still ongoing, has severely undermined the public trust not only in State institutions, but also in journalism and free media. Massive disinformation and fake news are among the major challenges facing our societies today.

It should be noted that in addition to this, the overall media environment was further disturbed during last year's 44-day war of aggression waged by Azerbaijan against Artsakh, with the direct support and participation of Turkey and Turkish-backed foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists. During that period, over 800 foreign media affiliated, and independent journalists arrived in Artsakh to cover the war and the evolving developments. The flow of journalists to Artsakh increased significantly after the decision of the Azerbaijani authorities to limit the ability of foreign journalists to cover the war from the Azerbaijani side. Those who were still allowed to go there, were reporting that the Azerbaijani government at all times monitored their movements and violated their right to cover the developments on the ground freely and in a professional manner. The Azerbaijani authorities also filed criminal cases against some journalists, for their reports about the war crimes of Azerbaijan.

Let me also remind that during the aggression against Artsakh, the Azerbaijani armed forces several times deliberately targeted journalists working in Artsakh, as a result of which 7 of them were severely injured, and one local resident accompanying the journalists was killed. Yuri Kotenok, another reporter for the Russian "Segodnya.ru" news service, who was covering Azerbaijan's attack on the Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Savior in Shushi, was seriously wounded on 8 October 2020, as a result of a second missile attack on the church.

We regret that all these crimes against journalists did not receive a proper response from the OSCE human rights institutions, as they were effectively beheaded by at least two participating States.

We have witnessed an unprecedented increase in cyber attacks and hackings on Armenian media resources and governmental websites. About 600 thousand such attacks were registered during this period. Recently, *Facebook* reported the closure of an entire so-called troll factory, including removal of 124 *Facebook* fake accounts, dozens of fake pages and groups, as well as *Instagram* profiles, which were associated with the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan.

We welcome your intention to further enhance close co-operation on a daily basis with the OSCE executive structures and, in particular, with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, since many of the challenges and violations we face in the OSCE area of responsibility are interlinked and cross-cutting. In terms of systemic and systematic problems which you mention in your report, we would like to draw your attention to the instances of hate speech and hate-motivated policies promoted by the highest authorities of Azerbaijan on a daily basis, which immediately trigger outpouring of mass hatred, manifestations of xenophobia and Armenophobia in the media and, most notably, in social media in Azerbaijan.

My delegation has consistently raised a number of issues, including those related to the necessity of safeguarding the conditions for journalists to freely perform their professional duties without any limitation, restrictions, fear of reprisal, blacklisting or punishment. It should also be remembered that the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media covers the entire OSCE region, including the conflict zones.

We also believe that the RFOM should be extremely vigilant and cautious while considering any possible activity, proposals, engagement with those who are notorious in curbing and harassing free media and challenging media freedom.

Let me once again reiterate our readiness to work closely with your Office on tackling the problem of fake news and increasing media literacy within our societies.

We concur with your approach that some issues require a more strategic and long-term approach, including means of silent diplomacy and sustained dialogue, we also welcome that you will keep public interventions in your toolkit.

In conclusion, Madame Ribeiro, let me once again reiterate our support to you and express hope that the shadows of the recent past in relation to your predecessor will not constrain you in carrying out your mandated activities.

Thank you.