



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President George Tsereteli (MP, Georgia)

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media's 15th South Caucasus Media Conference

18 July 2018, Tbilisi, Georgia

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to open this 15th South Caucasus Media Conference, and to see the continued interest that the OSCE attaches to media freedom and development in this region. The theme proposed for this edition – to promote quality journalism as a means to protect and boost trustworthy and credible information – is timely.

It is timely, not only for journalists, but also for politicians and governments who have to operate in a new media environment.

At the onset, I think it is important to reiterate what I am sure you discussed during the previous edition of this conference in May – that we are not actually discussing a new issue when we discuss fabricated information.

Propaganda – or “fake news” – has been around for hundreds of years. What makes it seem new is the immediacy provided by mobile technologies and social media.

The digital revolution has been a fantastic development for communication. I can attest myself of the radical changes it has allowed in the world of politics and international affairs.

Easy access to those technologies has also lowered the entry barrier to journalism. This continues to be a very positive development when you think about closed and controlled societies in the OSCE area and around the world.

But a lack of appreciation by the wider public of the varying quality of journalistic work runs the risk of ruining the credibility of journalism as a whole. Indeed, recent events have shown that while we may benefit from huge amounts of information available at our fingertips, information technology is being abused by untold amounts of disinformation.

We have all seen the perverse effects of “fake news” on domestic and international politics: public debates have become more polarized, public opinion has been influenced, and there are fewer opportunities for an in-depth analysis of our political issues.

Ultimately, the instrumentalization of “fake news” as a strategic political tool clearly poses a serious danger to democracy and its core values.

To put it simply: there is no democracy without good journalism.

In our Berlin Declaration adopted last week, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly encouraged new steps to promote high-quality journalism. Journalists and politicians are often seen as having an adversarial relationship, but I can assure you from our debates that parliamentarians are concerned about the negative impact of fake news and propaganda.

I urge you as journalists to work with politicians in the interests of good journalism and democracy. Yes, a politician will be unhappy about individual stories that paint him or her in a negative light. But we still value your work immensely.

Indeed, there is an urgent need to restore the status of free and independent journalism as a central source of credible and reliable information to counter the informational chaos, and I am sure this conference will be an important contribution towards that goal.

In debates during our Annual Session, we also highlighted the need to combine this with promoting media literacy and to build our population’s resilience to misinformation.

Parliamentarians have a role to play to achieve these objectives. Mindful that in today's world there are no borders to information, there needs to be some degree of regulatory convergence across the OSCE area.

For example, we can highlight the importance of journalism as a public good by supporting strong and independent public broadcasters.

As you have seen a couple months ago when Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was called to testify by the U.S. Congress and the EU Parliament, we can also – and should – hold Internet intermediaries to account to filter misinformation and “low quality” social media posts, while building protections against over-removal and building in ways to restore legitimate content.

I am sure you will have an opportunity over the next couple days to identify other areas where parliamentarians can support efforts to promote quality journalism throughout the OSCE area, and I look forward to these informing our debates within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Prior to closing, I want to highlight the strong support of the OSCE PA, reiterated in the Berlin Declaration of last week, to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Mr. Désir, you will have seen that the OSCE PA calls on you to continue to be a strong and public voice in favour of freedom of expression and the media, and to continue your work in addressing fake news and propaganda.

As you continue your efforts on these areas, let me underline our complementary work on freedom of the media. I am glad that in the past year our Third Committee Chair, Mr. Ignacio Sanchez Amor, worked closely with the governmental side of the OSCE and your Office, and I am sure that our new chair, Ms. Margaret Kiener Nellen, will continue along the same path.

Thank you.