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COUNTRY: Ukraine

COMMITTEE: Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)

CONFLICT: Accomplishing Freedom of Press and Protection of Journalists Within Conflict Zones

The continuous difficulties of threats to "journalists’ safety and impunity for crimes committed against them" are focal points in the present world. Freedom of the press is the freedom to express news, ideas, and thoughts willingly. It includes the right to freely obtain information and ideas, improve them by commenting and criticizing them, publish and distribute them freely. Freedom of the press represents the rights of the public, and if neglected, it also restricts people’s rights. Press freedom has been violated in the past, and press censorship has resulted from crises like World Wars. Many countries have varying levels of press censorship, which are usually excused by the necessity to uphold national security, public order, or the nation's moral values. Some governments intentionally restrict journalistic freedom through laws, internet bans, and other measures. China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, North Korea, Egypt, Vietnam, Belarus, Myanmar, Venezuela, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan all have press control for the reasons listed above. The influence of the press is multilateral, especially in areas of conflict. They are playing significant roles in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the civil war in Yemen, the Gaza war, the Israel-Palestine crisis, and other ongoing conflicts. It can be said that providing protection and enhancing the press’s rights by emphasising their roles has begun to attract attention in recent years, with the aforementioned escalating events. Although Ukraine’s press policies are protected by the constitution, some exceptional war and conflict circumstances inhibit a completely free media; however, some media organizations and journalists continue to inform the public.

The international community has taken many steps over the years to support press freedom as a fundamental component of democracy and human rights. Through programs like World Press Freedom Day, the UN is advocating for journalist safety, information access, and global awareness, especially through UNESCO and the Human Rights Council.(3) The right to freedom of expression is emphasized in foundational documents like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which provide legal protections.(6) Through tools like the Media Freedom Act, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and public monitoring platforms, regional organizations like the European Union and Council of Europe have strengthened media independence. To protect press freedom among its 57 member states, the OSCE appointed a Special Representative on Freedom of the Media. Regional commitments have been strengthened by declarations such as the African Union's Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Windhoek Declaration (1991). Furthermore, international coalitions and non-governmental organizations—such as the International Press Institute, Reporters Without Borders, and the Committee to Protect Journalists—continue to record violations, promote reform, and safeguard journalists across the globe. These global accords, organizations, and movements come together to provide a strong foundation for protecting press freedom everywhere.

Freedom of the press and expression are guaranteed by the 1996 Ukrainian Constitution, which was adopted after Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The early years were marked by a struggle against governmental control of the media because of the lingering Soviet regime. Many news outlets were owned or controlled by the state. Despite the emergence of independent media, many of them were influenced by political oligarchs. Reports of intimidation and censorship of journalists, particularly those who opposed the government, were common under President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005). These circumstances have led to increased government control over the press for national security, particularly after 2014 in the Donbas and since 2022 with the full-scale Russian invasion. Ukraine's most recent media law, which President Volodymyr Zelenskiy signed into law on December 29, 2022, and went into force in March, is a requirement for EU membership. Despite the ongoing conflict, Ukraine has made strides toward aligning its media legislation with European standards. The bill enhanced regulation by introducing more information about media owners and co-regulatory procedures between the media and the media regulator. Ukraine's press policy gained a new dimension as a result of this development. Ukraine frequently participates in World Press Freedom Day activities organized by UNESCO. Also in panels and talks on media freedom, Ukrainian journalists, civil society members, and government leaders have highlighted the difficulties of reporting in times of war.(1)

Governments and countries should enable the press to reflect the truth to the public. A transparent and credible press can provide the freedom of speech that people have. Press actions shape people’s thoughts and create a suitable environment so that the voices of the public can be heard. To keep the information flow, governments should ensure the protection and the safety of journalists. Their role is to transfer the truth to the nations, and thus those nations can easily determine their moral tenets with the given information, if the journalists' safeties are guaranteed by facilitating their jobs. Firstly, the legislation about the protection of the press should be prioritized to provide the aforementioned cycle. Annual assemblies should be organized by some mediator countries that accentuate the importance of the press to change the hostile views of some groups against journalists. There should be deterrent sanctions for the countries that pose a high risk and that contain harassment, imprisonment, and violent attacks against the press. Censorship implementations should be considered with the action’s reason, restricted access to the media in a country that has a purpose as providing security, protecting morals, and suppressing disruptive rebellions may be maintained for the solidarity. However, with the obstructive groups’ purposes that perceive information as a threat to their interests and power, censorship cannot be acceptable. For some groups that try to undermine the press with their stereotypes should be suppressed by the authorized organizations. As the Republic of Ukraine, we believe that the freedom of the press is the freedom of the public, unless there are some exceptional situations. The press provides the voices to be heard and should be protected under any circumstances from all persecution that is dangerous to them.

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