

**United Nation Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, discussion IV
"Parliaments working with others: is there room for more engagement?"**

Written statement on the restriction of freedom of speech and opinion by the Ukrainian parliament. Prepared and submitted by the All-Ukrainian Human Rights Platform "Uspishna Varta", Ukraine, Kiev

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We appreciate the convening of today's debate and would like to express our support for the efforts of the UN to provide a platform for promoting dialog between parliaments and other civil society organisations.

Now we see a reduction in the size of the democratic space in Ukraine. And too often the initiator of this reduction is the Parliament of Ukraine.

We would argue that **the right to freedom of thought and speech and to freely express views and beliefs** - which is enshrined in article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which were ratified by Ukraine - **is GROSSLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY violated by Ukraine in the Parliament of Ukraine.**

A few days ago in the Ukrainian parliament a draft law from the ruling presidential faction was registered. In this draft law people's deputies propose to amend the Ukrainian Criminal Code and establish criminal liability for alleged slander. The reason for this is the death of Ukrainian activist **Kateryna Gandzyuk**, who died after she was attacked by unknown persons. A number of Ukrainian media agencies and active citizens carried out their own investigation and found that the alleged orderer of the murder of Kateryna comes from the environment close to Ukrainian people's deputies.

These investigations have been published. And now these deputies propose to punish the media for alleged defamation. And they propose a draft law on criminal liability and imprisonment from 2 to 5 years with the deprivation of the right to engage in certain activities for up to 3 years for the "deliberate dissemination of such information in works, the media, and on the Internet." In fact, if this law is adopted, **it will mean a ban on the profession of a journalist in Ukraine.**

My colleague **Pavel Sheremet** died when he left his house to come to our morning "Radio Vesti" broadcast. My colleague and fellow "Vesti" journalist **Vyacheslav Veremiy** died during Maidan. The journalist **Oles Buzina** was killed when he was leaving his own house.

From September 17 of this year ultra-right-wing radical formations have already committed 3 attacks against journalists in Ukraine.

Recently the people's deputy from the presidential faction Oleg Barna said "Fuck you" in response to the clarifying question asked by the journalist Igor Koltunov. And now Oleg Barna demands to deprive this journalist of his accreditation in the Parliament and to initiate a draft law that will ban all journalists from entering the session hall of the parliament.

On October this year the Parliament of Ukraine adopted at the first reading Law, which stipulates that the print media of Ukraine must be published only in the Ukrainian language. They can be published in other languages only if the content is completely identical to the Ukrainian-language original. Electronic media must have a page in Ukrainian, which should be loaded by default as the home page.

These requirements will lead to an additional financial burden being placed on many Ukrainian media agencies.

They completely refuse to listen to and hear the people of Ukraine. In response to a Ukrainian who called the studio of the Ukrainian TV channel "ZIK" and asked a question about the inactivity of the government, the former people's deputy of Ukraine and current Deputy Minister Yury Grymchak said the following verbatim:

"We also know how to shoot, sometimes better than you. Hey you, smart ass, we will shoot so much that for you it won't seem like something small. We are not going to run away from power. I know how to shoot, and my friends know how to shoot too"...

Today, **the Ukrainian Parliament has become a place where a real language of hatred is being produced** - in relation to discordant persons, the media, and people who have a different point of view.

Today the Ukrainian Parliament is the main initiator of the infringement of freedom of speech in Ukraine. Politicians are trying to regulate and interfere in the activities of the media in Ukraine, including via legislative norms and sanctions against media organizations.

It is obvious that more effective mechanisms of involving journalists and human rights defenders in the legal monitoring of the legislation that is being adopted by parliaments is required, especially during an electoral campaign and a military conflict, which is currently the case in Ukraine.

We kindly ask the international community and the UN structures to pay more attention to the issue of turning the Ukrainian parliament towards transparency and the maintenance of a sufficient level of rights and freedoms, regardless of political expediency.

More information can be found on website of the Human Rights Platform "Uspishna Varta"
<https://uspishna-varta.com/en>