

Speech: OSCE Human Dimension Committee meeting on Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international legal obligations and OSCE commitments, encompasses a right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The right to freedom of expression ... will include freedom ... to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority.

In this modern era of 24 hour news, print, broadcast, online and social media, a major challenge for the public is not lack of information but sifting and interpreting it. Distinguishing fact from fiction in a crowded information landscape is not always easy. Deliberately distorted or false information can cause confusion and sow mistrust. It can influence attitudes and affect behaviour. It can damage social cohesion and undermine conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation efforts.

In this Human Dimension Committee meeting we will consider the importance of our ability to distinguish fact from opinion, or from fiction, and the consequences for democracy, tolerance, stability and security if we cannot.

Should the public be protected from deliberate disinformation – and if so how? Does the right to freedom of expression protect the deliberate dissemination of disinformation? What are the respective duties and responsibilities of governments, media actors, social media companies, civil society organisations and individuals? What is the role of the state – to educate, regulate or censor? What are the implications for trust between government and citizen, citizen and media, and media and government?