



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Ukraine

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States would like to raise its concern about recent developments in Ukraine that have had the effect of undermining media freedom during a critical chapter in Ukraine's history.

On February 17, Radio Dovira stopped Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) broadcasts after new management assumed control of the station. When Radio Kontyent picked up RFE/RL, the transmissions were reportedly jammed. On March 3, Ukrainian authorities confiscated Kontyent's transmitter on grounds that it had no valid license. Radio Kontyent has been allegedly broadcasting illegally for several years. The timing of this seizure of its equipment, just after it started broadcasting RFE/RL, and at the beginning of the presidential election campaign, gives rise to concern this act was politically inspired.

Separately, there have been credible reports of a significant increase in administrative harassment by the State Tax Administration (STA) in a selective way against journalists who do not support pro-presidential forces and against companies that belong, or are presumed to belong, to opposition supporters. These reports include but are not limited to frequent tax-inspector visits to companies and newsstands of Ostrov editor Yevhen Talyshch; a tax case against the journalist who published articles in Ostrov critical of the Donetsk Oblast Tax Administration; Increased tax investigations against Lvivska Hazeta, following publication of articles critical of the former head of the Lviv Oblast Tax Administration.

Mr. Chairman, freedom of the media is a core OSCE commitment and central to the conduct of free and fair elections. Unfortunately, measures that reduce the space for a free and independent media undermine the credibility of Ukraine's commitment to free and fair elections. We call upon Ukraine to demonstrate its support for media freedom and the prospect for free and fair elections by lifting measures targeting journalists and media outlets that offer Ukrainians an independent voice on political matters.

Thank you.