

Statement by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden on strategic communication and support to independent media:

The Nordic and Baltic Ministers for Foreign Affairs discussed the ongoing campaign of biased media coverage by mainstream Russian media, including in relation to the crisis in Ukraine but also in a wider context. The NB8 has made this topic one of its focus areas in 2015 with a view to identifying common approaches. Meetings gathering media professionals as well as other like-minded states and international organizations have contributed to clarifying the need to support free media (i.a. in Riga on 27 January 2015, Copenhagen on 27 February 2015 and a related meeting in Vilnius on 9-10 March).

The NB8 Ministers for Foreign Affairs underlined that propaganda and disinformation undermine the concept of independent media, which is a fundamental precondition for free and pluralistic democracies. The NB8 Ministers for Foreign Affairs therefore highlighted the following three approaches:

1) The Ministers remain committed to furthering strategic communication, based on facts and openness, and to supporting independent media.

The Ministers underlined the importance of coordinating efforts and of working bilaterally within the group as well as multilaterally. The Ministers welcomed, in this regard, the valuable efforts within the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as the Baltic Council of Ministers, and expressed their full support to this engagement.

Within the EU, those NB8 States which are also Members of the EU have encouraged action towards strategic communication and support to independent media. The Foreign Affairs Council thus adopted conclusions in January 2015 affirming its commitment. The EU Heads of State and Government echoed these conclusions in March 2015, inviting the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States and EU institutions, to prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication.

Ministers of those NB8 States which are Members of NATO also encourage Alliance efforts to strengthen strategic communication capabilities.

2) The Ministers expressed their support to initiatives aiming at reaching out to Russian-speakers with alternative sources of information. The aim is to ensure a pluralistic media landscape, where all people have easy access to independent information. We support that public service actors and private initiatives in all NB8 States share their know-how and join hands in these efforts. Ministers agreed to look into a mechanism to counter disinformation. Furthermore, the NB8 should look into joint efforts to support capacity-building in free and independent media.

3) The Ministers support i.a. the efforts undertaken by the European Endowment for Democracy with respect to supporting Russian-language media in the Eastern Partnership States and beyond.