



VICE PRESIDENT VĚRA JOUROVÁ

**COUNTRY VISIT: SLOVENIA
DAY 2**

LOCATION: LJUBLJANA

DATE AND TIME: 1-2 MARCH 2023

MEMBER RESPONSIBLE: [REDACTED]

Meeting with parliamentary committees

Time: 9h00-10h00

Venue : National Assembly, Šubičeva 4, Ljubljana

Scene setter

You are meeting members of the Committee on EU Affairs, the Committee on Justice and the Committee on Culture on 2 March from 9.00 to 10.00. This is an opportunity to discuss ongoing rule of law issues, media policy and media freedom, as well as disinformation, in particular in the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

Choreography must still be confirmed by the Parliament, but in general you should have opening remarks of ca. 20 minutes followed by Q&A. The three chairs of the committees will be present. The number of MPs is still tbc, but we expect around 10 of them in the room.

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - ask what the Committees have done so far to address the recommendations of the 2022 rule of law report
 - set out our plans for policies on media freedom and fighting disinformation

Key messages

- It is a great honour for me to be invited to the Parliament of Slovenia and to have this exchange with you.
- Unfortunately, this is not business as usual.
- All of our work has been heavily affected by the Russian invasion on Ukraine. It affects me also personally. I have been to Lviv and Kiev recently. I have the deepest admiration and sympathy for Ukrainian fight against the invasion, for their courage and resilience.
- For me this is key moment for Europe, for the EU, for the Member States, including Slovenia, and our allies.
- This is why I want to start by congratulating you, the Parliament, the government and most of all, to the Slovenian people for your support, for your generosity and solidarity with Ukraine.
- The EU is united against the threat and Putin's aggression on Ukraine. And our unity and decisive reaction is the best way to make sure Kremlin pays the price for the unjustified war.
- This war is also a reminder about the fact that democracies have enemies; that there are external and internal threats to democracies. This is why we have a collective duty to strengthen the fundamentals of our democracies.
- I want to discuss with you some of those fundamentals today.

On the rule of law

- Allow me to start with the rule of law. The European Union is based on the rule of law, and respect for this value is the guarantor of the protection of all other values, including democracy and fundamental rights.

- This Commission has been very active to uphold the rule of law across the EU, of course within the boundaries of EU Treaties.
- We have enlarged our toolbox to support the rule of law. The new tools include a preventive annual rule of law report about each and every country in the EU, including Slovenia. The idea is to identify the potential challenges before they become too big. The rule of law report is a successful tool, also because it allows for the a discussion on the European level among the Council, namely among the ministers from the member states and the Commission.
- It also facilitates the meetings like we have today, with the national parliaments.
- Then, we have the budget conditionality regulation that protects EU funds from going into countries where rule of law issues could pose a risk to the EU budget. We have triggered this instrument against Hungary for the first time.
- We of course have other tools, such as infringement procedures or the article 7 procedure.
- When it comes to Slovenia, the rule of law report from last year contained several recommendations. I am sure you know them well, but just to recall they refer to number of areas, including judicial independence, anti-corruption system, independence of public service media and safety of journalists.
- During my visit in Slovenia, I will discuss these issues and I hope to hear on them also from you.
- The 2023 Rule of Law Report is presently under preparation. The Commission will pay particular attention to how the Member States have implemented the recommendations.

Media freedom

- Another important pillar of democracy are free and independent media.
- This is why we have intensified our efforts at EU level to protect the media.
- We have taken major steps over the past years.
- First, when we started this mandate, in 2019, we decided to place media freedom and pluralism at the heart of our thinking on the rule of law across Europe. And to look at it in relation with other factors: the fight against corruption, the independence of the judiciary as well as constitutional checks and balances.
- We saw that no Member State was immune to threats against media freedom and pluralism.
- Our first priority has been the security of journalists.
- We presented in 2021 recommendations to Member States on the safety of journalists. It addressed a series of issues including investigation and prosecution of crimes against journalists, cooperation with law enforcement, support mechanisms and online safety.
- Member States have to report back to the Commission in spring on what they have done. This will feed into our annual rule of law report to be published in the summer.
- A second key initiative that we put forward is legislation against abusive litigation of journalists, so called anti-SLAPP.
- Simply, the rich and powerful sometimes abuse the law to entangle journalists in long and expensive legal proceedings. They want to shut them up and create chilling effect. Daphne Caruana Galizia had 47 of such lawsuits at the time of her assassination. So, we want to limit the use of this legal technique. We want to level the odds and support journalists in such situations.

- Finally, we broke new ground with the Media Freedom Act. This proposal will enshrine, for the first time in the EU law, common safeguards to protect media pluralism and the editorial independence of the media.
- It will protect journalist against illegal spying, as we have seen with Pegasus or Predator.
- It will protect the independence of public service media.
- This law is now being discussed by the European Parliament and the Member States. We need to find an agreement soon and I really count your support.
- I was pleased to hear the strong support of Culture Minister Asta Vrečko at the Culture Council last November.
- I also took note of the media reform that Slovenia is working on right now. I understand one of the main objectives is to increase the independence of public service media from political interference. The Media Freedom Act has similar objective in mind.
- These efforts are very important and they go very much in the same direction as our action at EU level.
- We need to work together to protect the media as a key pillar of our democratic societies.
- Let me conclude with a few words on our work to counter disinformation and foreign influence.

On disinformation and foreign interference

- Our approach to disinformation, in peace times, has been to counter lies with facts and education, to work with online platforms to diminish the reach of lies and cut money going to disinformation. We want to make the online world more transparent, responsible and accountable.

- We have finalised new legislation, the Digital Services Act, to end the Digital Wild West and have more accountability and responsibility, especially from big online players. But we cannot regulate everything and we need to respect the freedom of speech.
- We went beyond legislation, and we have proposed new anti-disinformation Code which functions as a co-regulatory tool.
- The new Code is very important to fight disinformation which is not always illegal.
- Disinformation and foreign interference are on the rise in the EU. Russia's war in Ukraine is just a starker reminder of this. The Kremlin is fighting its war not only with bombs, but also with words. Since the war started, the Kremlin has unleashed a tsunami of propaganda.
- But it has been engaged in disinformation and foreign influence long before that.
- Disinformation is coordinated and well-funded state activity. This is a problem. Disinformation is an integral part of Russia's military doctrine in different shape and forms. This is why this is a security threat.
- Today, this is a multi-million euro weapon of mass manipulation aimed both internally at the Russians as well as at Europeans and the rest of the world.
- The Slovenian information space is not immune to this.
- Since the war, we also see that even official Russian channels such as diplomacy or other official social media accounts are used to spread disinformation content. This we have not seen before the war. This is new. They are all in.

- We believe an effective response to disinformation requires a whole-of-society approach and the involvement and accountability of all sectors – from public authorities and politicians, media and civil society to the industry and of course online platforms.
- The code I mentioned earlier contains a detailed set of voluntary commitments to fight online disinformation in various areas such as demonetisation, addressing manipulative behaviours, user empowerment or fact-checking.
- In addition to major online platforms and players from the online advertising industry, new signatories include smaller or specialised platforms, research and civil society organisations, fact-checkers and providers of technical solutions to counter disinformation.
- The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and its national hubs are instrumental in the fight against disinformation.
- EDMO has established a task force on the war in Ukraine. It has identified more than 1800 disinformation instances related to the war. Their analysis confirms that the percentage of detected disinformation about the war in Ukraine is significantly higher – sometimes above 50% – in Central and Eastern European countries than in other parts of the EU.
- I am glad that a new EDMO regional hub has started covering Slovenia. It covers Slovenia and Croatia bringing together researchers and fact-checkers with knowledge of local information environments to help in the work of detecting, exposing and analysing disinformation campaigns and trends in these countries. It is operational from the beginning of this year.

- But with the war, we had to take urgent and strong decisions at EU level. Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. We could not let lies justifying this atrocious war spread across the EU and manipulate public opinion. Those lies are abusing freedom of expression, a right that we all have fought for and that we need to protect.
- This is also about unity and solidarity. Several national regulators, especially in countries close to Russia, with Russian communities, had suspended Russia's state channels for some time, as they understand very well the danger for their security and territorial integrity.
- So, our approach in the EU is to diminish the space for propaganda and increase the space for independent media. And our decisions are limited in time.
- Disinformation is an ever-present and evolving threat.
- There is still more work to be done, in particular, in smaller Member States and languages. The new Code obliges the platform signatories to implement the Code's commitments and measures efficiently in all Member States and languages.
- The first country level data were published by signatories of the Code, especially big platforms. We expect another, more detailed report in July.
- The EU approach is fully in line with European values and international human rights standards, in particular freedom of expression. The overall strategy aims to make the online environment more transparent and its actors accountable, to empower citizens, and to foster open democratic debate.

CV of Franc Breznik, President of the Parliamentary Committee on EU Affairs



Born on 23 July 1970 in Maribor

Education

2008	Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Commercial and Business Sciences, Celje
2000	Bachelor's degree, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, University of Maribor
1990	Secondary School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Maribor

Professional experience

2022 –	Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia (opposition Slovenian democrats SDS-EPP).
2020	State Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior
2018–2022	Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia
2014–2018	Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia
2011–2014	Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia
2011	Rogaška Kristal, Head of Sales for Germany and Switzerland
1998–2010	Ministry of Defence, Slovenian Armed Forces – Head of Logistics
1993–1997	Siemens d.d. (Vienna, Austria), Head of RPA Development Team
1991–1993	Head of Cash Registers Repair Service, Hugin-Sweda

CV of Lana Grgurevič, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Justice



- Born on 28 November 1972 in Maribor
- Member of Parliament for the coalition junior party Freedom Movement (GS-Renew)

Education

- Postgraduate studies in Labour Law and Social Security Law
- State bar exam
- Bachelor's degree, Faculty of Law, University of Maribor

Professional experience

- Senior Assistant Judge – Maribor District Court Judicial
- Trainee – Koper Higher Court Student Affairs and International Cooperation Office – Faculty of Law, University of Maribor
- Cultural Events Organiser – Kinematografi Maribor

CV of Tamara Vonta, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture



- Born on 13 December 1970
- Member of Parliament for the coalition junior party Freedom Movement (GS-Renew)

Education

1998 Bachelor's degree, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana

Professional experience

2022– Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia

2021 E-Posavje news portal

2017 Director-General, Media Directorate, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia

2016 Course Lecturer, Organisation of Media Production, Higher Vocational College for Media Production

2015 Independent Professional Assistant, Centre for School and Outdoor Education Ljubljana (work in Roma settlements)

2014–2018 Member of Municipal Council, Municipality of Krško

2013–2014 State Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

2011–2013 Deputy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia

2009–2013 Lecturer in Journalism and AV Production Course Leader, Faculty of Media, Ljubljana

2006 Training provider in the field of media appearances and media

2005–2013 Lecturer, Institute and Academy of Multimedia, Ljubljana

2005 Leskovec pri Krškem Elementary School

1995 News Presenter, Journalist, Editor and Mentor of the daily news programme 24 UR, POP TV (private television network)

1991 Journalist and Radio Presenter, Radio Brežice, Studio D, RGL, Kanal A

Courtesy meeting with the Speaker of the House

Ms Klakočar Zupančič

Time: 10h05-10h20

CV of Urška Klakočar Zupančič, President of the National Assembly



- Born on 19 June 1977 in Trbovlje
- Vice President of the coalition junior party Freedom Movement (GS-Renew).

Education

- 2011 Master's degree in legal history: Division of Inherited Property in Ancient Babylon 2005 Bar examination 2002 Graduate thesis: The Economic Role of the United Nations in the Context of Globalization (with a focus on Slovenia)
- 1996–2001 Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana

Professional experience

- 13 May 2022– President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia
- 2021–2022 Director of legal and business consulting firm Ipsilaw pravno in poslovno svetovanje, d.o.o.
- End of 2008–2021 Local Court Judge at the Ljubljana Local Court (non-contentious law: property law, corporate law, denationalisation, law of inheritance, strata title law)
- 2007–2008 Senior Judicial Advisor in the Office of the President of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia
- 2005–2006 Senior Judicial Advisor at the Kranj District Court
- 2003–2004 Judicial Trainee at the Ljubljana Higher Court
- 2002–2003 Legal Advisor at the Slovenian Export Corporation, Inc. (now SID d.d. – Slovenian Export and Development Bank)
- 2001 Internship at the United Nations Headquarters in New York (Economic and Social Council)

Public debate on media freedom and disinformation

Time: 11h00-12h30

Venue: EU House

Scene setter

You are taking part in a public debate on media freedom, information manipulation and disrupting disinformation in times of war. The event takes place in hybrid format (online and up to 120 people in the room) on 2 March from 11.00 to 12.30 at the premises of the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Slovenia. Simultaneous interpretation English-Slovenian will be available.

This is an opportunity to discuss the disinformation and EU proposals to tackle it, information manipulation as an instrument in Russia's war against Ukraine, Radio Free Europe, and the European Media Freedom Act.

The panel will be moderated by [REDACTED] media network Meta's list, following brief opening remarks by Jerneja Jug Jerše, Head of the European Commission in Slovenia. Confirmed panellists include Ms Nataša Pirc Musar, President of the Republic of Slovenia, and Mr Andrii Taran, Ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of Slovenia. CVs are included in your file.

You will not give any opening remarks, but we will move straight to Q&A. The first question will go to the President.

After the discussion the floor will be opened for questions from the audience (live and virtual).

Topics/questions:

- How big of a problem is freedom of the media, spread of disinformation today?
- The ambition of European Media Freedom Act / how does EU fight against disinformation / legislative proposals, tools, initiatives at EU disposal ... what works?
- About information manipulation attempts to undermine EU/international support for Ukraine and exploit sensitive issues within the EU such as migration and refugees, cost of living, energy prices.

- About the battle for narrative / parts of the world least resilient to info manipulation and what is EU doing ...
- About Radio Free Europe / maybe Defence Democracy package?
- How can people themselves get better immunity to the poison of disinformation / how could ordinary citizens make informed decisions

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - Encourage people to be aware of disinformation and to fight for media freedom

Key messages

Main messages

- Our approach to disinformation, in peace times, has been to counter lies with facts and education, to work with online platforms to diminish the reach of lies and cut money going to disinformation. We want to make the online world more transparent, responsible and accountable.
- We have finalised new legislation, the Digital Services Act, to end the Digital Wild West and have more accountability and responsibility, especially from big online players. But we cannot regulate everything, we need to respect the freedom of speech.
- We went beyond legislation, and we have proposed new anti-disinformation Code which functions as a co-regulatory tool.
- The new Code is very important to fight disinformation which is not always illegal. It will complement and go beyond the regulation such as DSA.

- The code contains a detailed set of voluntary commitments to fight online disinformation in various areas such as demonetisation, addressing manipulative behaviours, user empowerment or fact-checking.
- A substantial number and great variety of new signatories – 38 to date - have signed the code. In addition to major online platforms and players from the online advertising industry, new signatories include smaller or specialised platforms, research and civil society organisations, fact-checkers and providers of technical solutions to counter disinformation.
- 30 Signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation, including all major online platform signatories (Google, Meta, Microsoft, TikTok, Twitter), have submitted their first baseline reports.
- When it comes to demonetisation of disinformation actors, Google indicates that in Q3 2022 it prevented more than EUR 13 million of advertising revenues from flowing to disinformation actors in the EU.
- TikTok reported that in Q3 2022 they removed more than 800,000 fake accounts, while more than 18 million users were following these accounts. They also indicate that the fake accounts removed represent 0.6% of the EU monthly active users.
- The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and its national hubs are instrumental in the fight against disinformation.

- EDMO has established a task force on the war in Ukraine. It has identified more than 1800 disinformation instances related to the war. Their analysis confirms that the percentage of detected disinformation about the war in Ukraine is significantly higher – sometimes above 50% – in Central and Eastern European countries than in other parts of the EU.
- I am glad that a new EDMO regional hub has started covering Slovenia - ADMO. It covers Slovenia and Croatia bringing together researchers and fact-checkers with knowledge of local information environments to help in the work of detecting, exposing and analysing disinformation campaigns and trends in these countries. It is operational from the beginning of this year. Free speech is sacred also online, but we cannot be naïve. Platforms have an impact, their algorithms and services are being manipulated by Russia and others state and non-state actors. As a result, the information space is flooded by disinformation like never before.
- Now Russia has started a war. And they fight not only with bombs, but also with words.
- Take it from someone who grew up in the communist Czechoslovakia under the control of the Soviet Union – their methods have not changed. They want to poison our hearts and our minds, with fear and propaganda.
- And they are not stupid. They know in democracies especially disinformation is a war fighting for. If big portion of people is for or against something, politicians will be rightly influenced by it.

- This is why Russians spread lies about the causes for this war, dehumanising Ukrainians, calling them all Nazis; Russians also lie about the Western sanctions. That it is the sanctions that cause higher energy bills or global shortage of food.
- We have to be clear: there is only one guilty here: Russian authorities.
- I also want to remark that Russian disinformation, but also from other sources, does not always want to convince the people to do something.
- It's often about exploiting existing divisions. It's about relativising the truth and making people doubt in anything. It's about showing that 'everyone is as bad as we are'.
- There are of course special measures we were forced to take during the war.
- But with the war, we had to take urgent and strong decisions at EU level. Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. We could not let lies justifying this atrocious war spread across the EU and manipulate public opinion. Those lies are abusing freedom of expression, a right that we all have fought for and that we need to protect.
- This is also about unity and solidarity. Several national regulators, especially in countries close to Russia, with Russian communities, had suspended Russia's state channels for some time, as they understand very well the danger for their security and territorial integrity.
- So, our approach in the EU is to diminish the space for propaganda and increase the space for independent media. And our decisions are limited in time.

- RT and Sputnik have a proven track record of disinformation spreaders. This has been documented by many researchers, think tanks and media – and also regulators across the EU. Because the mission of RT and Sputnik is not to inform people: they are part of Russia’s military doctrine and are designed to serve the state. They are not only funded but controlled by the state.
- I am against creating ministry of truth, but I am also against Putin and his trolls or useful idiots having a free highway to Europe’s information space.
- Addressing disinformation effectively at speed and scale requires the active and continuing engagement of all relevant stakeholders – public authorities, industry, media and civil society.
- Disinformation is an ever-present and evolving threat.
- The EU approach is fully in line with European values and international human rights standards, in particular freedom of expression. The overall strategy aims to make the online environment more transparent and its actors accountable, to empower citizens, and to foster open democratic debate.
- The EU has also financed the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) which supports the creation of a cross-border and multidisciplinary community across Europe of independent fact-checkers and academic researchers aimed at detecting and analysing disinformation threats and trends across Europe.
- In addition, the EU works with like-minded international partners and stakeholders from civil society, media and industry through a range of channels on issues related to foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).

- This is not and should not be a debate about true versus false, right versus wrong information. Freedom of thought, with no normative judgement, and freedom to impart and receive information should always be protected within the boundaries of the Charter. These are the fundamental rights that we aim at protecting and any measure in this field should make sure that it does not inadvertently hinder them.
- Platforms and our other partners from industry must step up actions and do more to counter disinformation that threatens and harms our societies.
- There is still more work to be done, in particular, in smaller Member States and languages. The new Code obliges the platform signatories to implement the Code's commitments and measures efficiently in all Member States and languages.
- The substantial volume of disinformation around the war circulating in Central and Eastern Europe was highlighted at the EU High-Level Conference on the Future of the Internet held in Prague on 2 November. I have called upon the platforms to step up measures to address this.

On foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)

- The EU has been working on for many years on tackling foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), with reinforced urgency since 24 February 2022. The Member States, international partners like NATO and stakeholders from civil society and private industry are key partners in tackling the threat.

- The EU has different instruments and channels at hand for cooperation with respect to the threat. We are part of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) and other international fora. The EU also works closely with civil society in our neighbourhoods and third countries, where local experts have unique insights into the specific challenges on the ground and we highly value their knowledge.

Defence of Democracy package

- During the first half of 2023, we will adopt a ‘defence of democracy’ package to bring covert foreign influence and shady funding to light. The package will include proposals to protect our democracies and strengthen trust by defending our democratic system from outside interests.
- It will include the following main elements:
 - A legislative proposal to address covert foreign interference by putting forward harmonised measures on transparency and accountability especially of interest representation for third countries
 - A review of actions under the European Democracy Action Plan;
 - Measures on inclusive democratic participation, civic engagement, and secure and resilient elections. This will be designed along two specific recommendations: one on European elections and one supporting the civic space and civic engagement.
- The public consultation as well as the call for evidence were launched on 16 February, and will be open for contributions for eight weeks – I encourage you to give your say on this.

Media freedom

- Fighting disinformation and supporting media freedom are two sides of the same coin.
- This is why we have intensified our efforts at EU level to protect the media.
- We have made major steps over the past years.
- First, when we started this mandate, in 2019, we decided to place media freedom and pluralism at the heart of our thinking on the rule of law across Europe. And to look at it in relation with other factors: the fight against corruption, the independence of the judiciary as well as constitutional checks and balances.
- We saw that no Member State was immune to threats against media freedom and pluralism.
- The data collected help us design our policies.
- Our first priority has been the security of journalists.
- We presented in 2021 recommendations to Member States on the safety of journalists. It addressed a series of issues including investigation and prosecution of crimes against journalists, cooperation with law enforcement, support mechanisms and online safety.
- Member States have to report back to the Commission in spring on what they have done. This will feed into our annual rule of law report to be published in the summer.
- A second key initiative that we put forward is legislation against abusive litigation of journalists, so called anti-SLAPP.
- Simply, the rich and powerful sometimes abuse the law to entangle journalists in long and expensive legal proceedings. They want to shut them up and create chilling effect. Daphne Caruana Galizia had 47 of such lawsuits at the time of her assassination. So, we want to limit the use of this legal technique. We want to level the odds and support journalists in such situations.

- Finally, we broke new ground with the Media Freedom Act. This proposal will enshrine, for the first time in the EU law, common safeguards to protect media pluralism and the editorial independence of the media.
- It will protect journalist against illegal spying, as we have seen with Pegasus or Predator.
- It will protect the independence of public service media.
- This law is now being discussed by the European Parliament and the Member States. We need to find an agreement soon and I really count your support.
- I was pleased to hear the strong support of Culture Minister Asta Vrečko at the Culture Council last November.
- I am also pleased to hear about the media reform that Slovenia is working on right now.
- These efforts are very important and they go very much in the same direction as our action at EU level.
- We need to work together to protect the media as a key pillar of our democratic societies.

Support to Ukrainian media

- Our efforts to support media freedom do not stop at the borders of the EU and do not only focus on European journalists.
- I would like to say a few words on our action to support journalists in Ukraine and also Russian independent journalists.
- It is often said that the truth is the first victim of the war.
- This is why we need to defend those who fight to tell the truth about the war.
- I was in Lviv last September and more recently in Kyiv.

- In Lviv, I went to a media centre that the EU supports and that provides protective equipment and assistance to journalists.
- I met with a journalist whose colleague had been killed by the Russians.
- So many war crimes committed by Russia. Justice will need to be done.
- Beyond emergency support we also support the Ukrainian public broadcaster, we help repair the infrastructure which has been destroyed, like antennas. We give grants to small and bigger outlets because the economic situation is of course dramatic, with almost no advertising revenues anymore.
- In total we have now a budget of 30 million euros to support media in Ukraine and more than half has been spent.
- We will continue to support them in partnership with civil society.

On Radio Free Russia

- I am now also having a series with Russian independent journalists who had to flee their country to continue their work. In Russia, they face jail to tell the truth.
- I want to understand how the EU can ensure they can continue their work here in the best conditions.

- I am convinced we have a moral obligation to support democratic ideals also in Russia. Not with weapons, but with words.
- We must support those who want to fight against the tide and believe the Russian people ought to have a choice.
- This is why I am working on a Radio Free Russia project. This does not mean establishing a brand new radio station.
- I want to support those who are doing a lot already, help them to create economy of scale and fill the gaps so they can produce more content and distribute it more widely without any editorial interference. I want to support the idea of people to have choice.
- The hubs of Russian journalists and activists are now in the EU. We need to create the conditions for them to work and tell the story of the EU they see and experience to their Russian audiences. It is not only a moral duty, it is in our self-interest.

[Redacted]



[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Meeting with the Minister of Justice

Time: 13h30-15h00

Scene setter

You are meeting Minister of Justice Ms Dominika Švarc Pipan (SD-S&D) on 2 March for a working lunch from 13.30 to 15.00. This is an opportunity to discuss ongoing rule of law issues, but also anti-SLAPP and media regulation, hate speech sanctions, whistle-blowers, and Slovenia's strong engagement in ensuring Russian accountability for the war against Ukraine (e.g. war crimes tribunal, confiscation of assets, EU sanctions).

The 2022 rule of law report addressed the following two recommendations to Slovenia, relating to justice and anti-corruption, which fall within the competence of the Minister of Justice:

- Remove obstacles to the investigation and prosecution of corruption cases, including by ensuring the operational autonomy of the National Bureau of Investigation, increasing the resources of State Prosecution and revising the statute of limitation.
- Adopt and start implementing without further delay the anti-corruption strategy.

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - thank the minister for the good cooperation on the follow-up of the rule of law report;
 - seek support on the anti-SLAPP directive; inquire about action to implement the Commission Recommendation; push for the rapid nomination of a focal point;
 - welcome Slovenia's strong engagement in holding Russia accountable for war crimes committed in Ukraine.

Key messages

On the rule of law

- The key tool to monitor the rule of law is the **annual rule of law report**. We would like to thank your colleagues in the ministry of justice for the well organised and informative meetings during the **country visit last week** [on 23 February]. Commission services received detailed information on challenges identified in the 2022 rule of law report, including on the follow-up to recommendations.
- I particularly welcome the efforts already made regarding the appointment of candidate state prosecutors, which were previously delayed, and the measures to improve the human resources in the state prosecution service in general.
- We also note that a **number of reforms are currently under preparation**. This includes the financial situation of judges and prosecutors, judicial map reform, amendments to the Judicial Council Act, and the announced reform of the criminal law legislation. We will follow these reforms, as relevant, in the context of the annual rule of law report.

On anti-SLAPP

- The Commission anti-SLAPP initiative is part of broader efforts under the European Democracy Action Plan to strengthen media freedom and media pluralism and uphold the rule of law. This initiative is important to defend freedom of expression and democracy in the EU.
- The phenomenon of SLAPP – is gaining ground in the EU. We see instances of SLAPPs in many EU Member States.

- Our **proposed Directive** provides for targeted safeguards against SLAPP in cross-border situations. It also provides for a careful balance of fundamental rights. Member States will be able to adapt the safeguards to their national civil and procedural law.
- **The proposal will** deter the filing of SLAPP, enable the quick dismissal of a SLAPP once filed, and provide other remedies, such as award of costs, compensation of damages and penalties against an abusive claimant. In addition, the proposal will protect EU defendants against third-country SLAPP.
- In designing the proposal, I aimed to ensure sure that we maintain a careful balance of all rights involved. Because there is not only the perspective of those who are expressing their views through freedom of expression and information, but also that of those who claim the right of access to justice and the right to protect their private life and reputation.
- The proposed anti-SLAPP safeguards would protect our democracies while **maintaining important balance with the right of access to justice**. I know that this balance has been further improved in the text discussed in the Council at technical level. And this is important.
- Another important issue is ensuring that the protection is granted to those journalists and rights defenders who act in the public interest. **It is not a blank check for impunity.**
- The Council negotiations on the proposed Directive are currently ongoing and the Swedish Presidency is determined to reach a General Approach in June. I trust that **Slovenia will support the negotiations.**

- In addition, our Recommendation encourages Member States to **offer training on SLAPP** to legal professionals and potential targets to make sure that they are aware of when they could be dealing with a case of abusive litigation.
- **Awareness-raising activities** will make sure that these cases are detected earlier, and that the public understands that these cases are designed to silence journalists and human rights defenders.
- Member States should ensure that there are support mechanisms in place for targets of SLAPPs. **What is Slovenia doing in this regard?**
- **Member States should report certain data on SLAPP** to the Commission **by the end of 2023**. This will provide us with a comprehensive, EU-wide overview of the prevalence of SLAPP in Europe, allowing us to monitor the situation and fight this vile practice together.
- In addition, each **Member State should establish a focal point** that gathers and shares information on all organisations that provide guidance and support for SLAPP targets. I would appreciate your support in ensuring that **Slovenia** establishes such focal point swiftly.

On hate speech online

- We need to ensure that authors of the illegal hate speech are effectively prosecuted.
- On 9 December 2021, the Commission adopted a proposal to extend the current list of 'EU crimes' to hate crimes and hate speech. If this Council decision is adopted, the Commission would be able to propose secondary legislation defining criminal offences and penalties for hate speech and hate crime in the EU.

- We **thank Slovenia for the continued support** on reaching the necessary unanimity in favour of adoption of this decision.
- We also need mechanisms to ensure that online platforms remove hate speech on their services to prevent it from going viral.
- That is why, five years ago, we initiated a voluntary **code of conduct** with the major online platforms. As a result, they are assessing hate speech notices received by the users more promptly.
- We are in the process of identifying how the code could tie in with the provisions of the **Digital Services Act** to tackling illegal content online and responding to systemic risks. For example, very large platforms could use the code to address the specific systemic risks related to the spread of hate speech as well as to limits to freedom of expression.

On prosecuting war crimes in Ukraine

- I welcome the fact that the **Slovenian authorities have opened national investigations** into international crimes committed in Ukraine. 13 other Member States have opened similar investigations so far.
- I encourage you to **consider joining the Joint Investigation Team at Eurojust** in order to strengthen the coordination of your investigations with those of other national authorities.
- Eurojust has also been working on a **new database to store and preserve evidence** related to international crimes, which was partially launched on 9 February. I invite your authorities to make use of this database by sharing evidence on international crimes committed in Ukraine.

- Eurojust plays a crucial role in supporting the setting up of the **International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA)** within the Joint Investigation Team, which received full support during the European Council on 9-10 February 2023.
- The Commission fully supports the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** as the main actor in international criminal justice. I welcome that Slovenia has provided EUR 500 000 to a new trust fund established by the Office of the ICC Prosecutor.
- The Ukrainian Prosecutor General has informed the Commission that there is still an urgent **need for forensic experts and forensic equipment on the ground**. Have your authorities considered sending forensic experts via the ICC or via a bilateral agreement with Ukraine?
- I also welcome Slovenia's active participation in the "**Core-Group**" on establishing a **Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression**. There is a common understanding among Member States that the crime of aggression must not go unpunished. However, there is still some divergence of views on the way forward. Reflections will therefore continue in the next meeting of the Core Group in order to find a common position.
- Finally, I am aware that Slovenia plays a leading role in developing the **Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes**.
- Commissioner Reynders will attend the diplomatic conference in Ljubljana (15-26 May 2023) where the text should be agreed and adopted. The Commission is currently assessing possibilities how to best support the conference.

On the criminalisation of sanctions and the use of frozen assets

- **The Commission welcomes the efforts of Slovenia** in implementing Union sanctions. According to the data shared with the Commission, **Slovenia has frozen EUR 6 million of Russian assets so far.**
- We count on Slovenia to continue taking all the necessary measures to implement sanctions and abiding by its reporting obligations.
- The Commission aims to ensure that those violating Union sanctions regimes can be held criminally liable in all the Member States. That is why, on 2 December, **the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive** to harmonise the criminal definitions of, and penalties for, the violation of sanctions.
- The proposal will strengthen the enforcement of Union sanctions in the Member States and help to overcome the current fragmentation. It will decrease the risk of forum-shopping by offenders and reinforce the deterrent effect of sanctions.
- This proposal is linked to **the proposal for a Directive on asset recovery and confiscation**, presented by the Commission on 25 May 2022.
- Both proposals, once adopted by the European Parliament and the Council, will increase the possibilities of confiscation of Russian assets in the EU, as long as there is a link between such assets and criminal activities.
- The Commission welcomes Slovenia's support on this crucial file, which is a high priority for the Commission.

- The Commission firmly believes that **Russia must compensate the enormous losses caused to Ukraine and its people.**
- Due to the temporary and non-punitive nature of Union sanctions, frozen assets cannot be confiscated as such. Therefore, the Commission has launched other initiatives to ensure that Russia will pay for the damages it caused.
- At the end of November 2022, the Commission **presented some options to use Russian public assets that are currently immobilised with a view to supporting the reconstruction of Ukraine.**
- One option could be the temporary management of immobilised public assets. This would require identifying a financial structure to manage frozen or immobilised assets, in particular the liquid assets of the Russian Central Bank, invest them and use the net return on these investments to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine.
- The **Commission counts on Slovenia's support in advancing reflections on this important matter.**
- Additional long-term measures could consist in linking the lifting of the restrictions on these assets to the conclusion of a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine that settles the issue of reparation of the damage.
- Both options require us to identify the amount and location of frozen and immobilised public assets in the EU. To this end, we have proposed a **new reporting obligation** on 15 February as part of our tenth sanctions package proposal.

Media policy and support to journalists

- We have taken a range of unprecedented steps, such as sanctioning a number of Putin's instruments of war propaganda (e.g. RT, Sputnik, RTR Planeta, Rossiya 24, Rossiya 1, TV Centre International, NTV/NTV Mir, REN TV, Pervyi Kanal).
- The EU is actively and consistently supporting the Ukrainian media sector, civil society and government units in their joint efforts to tackle disinformation.
- The EU supports Russian-language independent media, journalists, and bloggers with a substantial programme that covers both emergency and longer-term needs. The programme follows a needs-based approach and responds to the evolving challenges facing Russian independent media, while ensuring the safety of beneficiaries.
- We are also working on launching a "radio free Europa" project to support independent Russian media that have been expelled from or fled their home country. We need to create the conditions for these journalists to work in the EU so that they can produce more content and distribute it more widely to their Russian audiences without any editorial interference.
- We are working on this project, and I hope we will soon be able to come with a more concrete strategy bringing together independent media providing content in Russian and supporting technical means to reach people in Russia.
- Russian-language independent media have been struggling for survival for a number of years due to the crackdown on free speech in the country, including with the laws on so-called "foreign agents", "undesirable organisations" and Russia's 2022 war censorship laws.

Media freedom in Slovenia

- Unfortunately, we are witnessing worrying developments across the EU, threatening media freedom and media pluralism.
- Such trends are visible also in Slovenia. The situation of media freedom and pluralism has not improved since last year.
- We have strong concerns about the safety and protection of journalists given the number of cases of threats, online harassment, physical violence, and lawsuits with intimidating effects against them. Besides, transparency of media ownership and access to information by journalists could be improved.
- Despite legal safeguards providing for the independence of public service media, challenges exist with regard to their effectiveness in practice in limiting political influence.
- I count on Slovenia to uphold EU values and support initiatives promoting democracy, media freedom and the rule of law.

**CV of Dominika Švarc Pipan,
Minister of Justice**



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Meeting with the Minister of Culture

Time: 15h15-16h15

Venue: Ministry of Culture

Scene setter

You are meeting Minister of Culture Ms Asta Vrečko (Levica-GUE/NGL) on 2 March from 15.15 to 16.15. This is an opportunity to discuss European media policy as well as the situation of Slovenian media and the planned Slovenian media reform. You may also wish to raise the topics of disinformation and the defence of democracy package, as relevant.

At the Culture Council in November, the Minister was part of the supporters of the Media Freedom Act. She said that the Act is important for the functioning of media services in the EU, also for the development of the digital market in times of societal changes and changes in interpersonal communications. She said it is our joint responsibility to provide independent and credible information to citizens.

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - learn more about the planned media reform in Slovenia
 - ask for Slovenia's continuous support on the European Media Freedom Act.
 - set out the importance of anti-SLAPP action

Key messages

Media freedom in Slovenia

- Many thanks Minister for your support at the Culture Council in November.
- The Media Freedom Act is an important piece of legislation for the EU.
- It is crucial we find an agreement by the end of this mandate.

- I hope the Swedish Presidency can find a general approach in May.
- I am of course at your disposal to discuss any questions that you would have about the Act.
- I would also be happy to hear more about the reforms that you have initiated at national level.

DEFENSIVE

The Commission is creating a Board to supervise all the media

- No. The Media Services Board is in fact an upgrade of the existing group of European Regulators, ERGA. The Act strengthens this group and gives it more responsibilities. Its tasks are well defined by the law, and **the Board is not a new authority overseeing the press, deciding on self-regulatory standards or ethics.** The Board will give non-binding opinions on national measures and concentrations affecting the media, in the single market. The idea is rather to promote a dialogue between regulators and to promote mutual understanding across the EU. We have done it in the past in other areas.
- The Board is absolutely not about concentrating power in Brussels. This about more cooperation among the relevant authorities. The Commission has no voting right but it has a role to play, as the guardian of EU law. We are open to further improve the text and bring necessary clarifications.

From the 2022 Rule of Law report on the national media regulator

The independence of the audio-visual media services regulator is ensured by the Electronic Communications Act. The independent status of AKOS is guaranteed

by the Electronic Communications Act, and the Agency draws its enforcement powers in the audiovisual media field from the Mass Media Act and the Audiovisual Media Services Act. The updated Audiovisual Media Services Act adopted in December 2021 aimed at transposing the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. A draft law aiming at transposing the Electronic Communications Code is still pending; the law would also include the conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head and members of the collegiate body of AKOS. As reported in the 2021 Report, challenges persist concerning the effectiveness of the draft new legal framework in ensuring the independent performance of media regulatory functions of AKOS. The financial independence of the agency continues to be guaranteed by its financing system, based on the collection of fees generated from AKOS activities. The regulator is responsible for a broad variety of tasks. Additional resources were granted to the regulator in the field of audiovisual media services following the new tasks attributed with the transposition of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. However, fully implementing the extensive competences with the available resources remains a challenge. The lack of safeguards against political interference also remains a concern. The Media Pluralism Monitor 2022 indicates a medium risk for the indicator on the independence and effectiveness of the media authority.

CV of Asta Vrečko, Minister of Culture



[Redacted text block containing multiple lines of information, likely a list of achievements or a detailed biography, obscured by grey bars.]

Meeting with Secretaries of State

Time: 17h15-18h00

Venue: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Scene setter

You are meeting **Mr Marko Štucin**, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign and European affairs (GAC minister), on 2 March from 17.15 to 18.15.

This is an opportunity to speak about the rule of law, as well as Slovenia's approach to Russian propaganda and disinformation.

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - stress the importance of respecting the rule of law in all EU Member States, in particular in the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine;
 - encourage a strong Slovenian response to tackling Russian disinformation.

Key messages

On the rule of law

- Faced with Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, we need – more than ever – to say very clearly how crucially important the rule of law is.
- I would like to stress the need to keep the Article 7 TEU proceedings regarding Poland and Hungary on the agenda of the General Affairs Council, for as long as the underlying causes that triggered these procedures continue to persist. These proceedings are useful and help to maintain political peer pressure among the Member States.

On disinformation and foreign interference

- Disinformation, information manipulation and interference, particularly by pro-Kremlin sources, is reaching audiences across the world. This poses substantial security risks and threatens the functioning of democracies and the well-being of societies around the world.
- The Slovenian information space is not immune to this.
- We believe an effective response to disinformation requires a whole-of-society approach and the involvement and accountability of all sectors – from public authorities and politicians, media and civil society to the industry and of course online platforms.
- It is also clear that there is simply still too much very harmful Ukraine related disinformation available online. And that more action is needed, in particular when it comes to smaller Member States and languages.
- The EU has taken strong and decisive steps in this fight. We now have several tools at our disposal:
- The EEAS created an EU hybrid toolbox (EUHT), and is developing an EU toolbox to counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).
- Member States and EU Institutions can conduct Hybrid Risk Surveys to identify areas vulnerable to hybrid threats across the EU and address possible gaps.
- We have put in place a Code of Practice on Disinformation.
- The code contains a detailed set of voluntary commitments to fight online disinformation in various areas such as demonetisation, addressing manipulative behaviours, user empowerment or fact-checking.

- A substantial number and great variety of new signatories – 38 to date - have signed the code. In addition to major online platforms and players from the online advertising industry, new signatories include smaller or specialised platforms, research and civil society organisations, fact-checkers and providers of technical solutions to counter disinformation.
- 30 Signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation, including all major online platform signatories (Google, Meta, Microsoft, TikTok, Twitter), have submitted their first baseline reports.
- When it comes to demonetisation of disinformation actors, Google indicates that in Q3 2022 it prevented more than EUR 13 million of advertising revenues from flowing to disinformation actors in the EU.
- TikTok reported that in Q3 2022 they removed more than 800,000 fake accounts, while more than 18 million users were following these accounts. They also indicate that the fake accounts removed represent 0.6% of the EU monthly active users.
- The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and its national hubs are instrumental in the fight against disinformation.
- EDMO has established a task force on the war in Ukraine. It has identified more than 1800 disinformation instances related to the war. Their analysis confirms that the percentage of detected disinformation about the war in Ukraine is significantly higher – sometimes above 50% – in Central and Eastern European countries than in other parts of the EU.

- I am glad that a new EDMO regional hub has started covering Slovenia - ADMO. It covers Slovenia and Croatia bringing together researchers and fact-checkers with knowledge of local information environments to help in the work of detecting, exposing and analysing disinformation campaigns and trends in these countries. It is operational from the beginning of this year.

**CV of Marko Štucin,
State Secretary for European affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**



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Meeting with NGOs

Time: 18h30-19h30

Venue: EU House

Scene setter

You are meeting members of the Legal Network for the Protection of Democracy (LNPD) on 2 March from 18.30 to 19.30. The network was established in 2021 with the aim of allowing Slovenian civil society to monitor, understand and protect the implementation of the rule of law principles in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The founding members of this informal coalition are Amnesty International Slovenia, IT-Institute for Other Studies – Today is a New Day, PIC – Legal-Informational Center for NGOs, and the Institute for Culture of Diversity Open. The network cooperates with various attorney offices, professors of law and volunteers.

The main aim of the network is to offer legal protection to individuals and organisations in their peaceful work for the respect, implementation and protection of democratic principles and human rights, which have been put under pressure by the government's measures, in particular under the former government led by Janez Janša (SDS-EPP), whose modus operandi soon raised concerns of the NGOs.

The NGO also worked with media experts to draft a new law on the public broadcaster RTV Slovenia. Their draft was the basis for the government's legislative proposal. However, after taking effect on 28 December 2022, the law was stayed by the Constitutional Court, defeating one of the law's main goal, namely "depoliticizing" the public broadcaster.

In its first year the LNPD responded to over 1 150 inquiries and requests, filed over 150 appeals to state offices, including to the state prosecutor's office, and helped file over 50 lawsuits against the government's actions and measures. It also organised 2 public expert discussions and filed 1 criminal charge against a governmental official. Some members were also active in the Friday protests movement (every Friday during the 2020-2022 PM Janša government), while

Amnesty International conducted monitoring of the right to assembly at the protests.

Besides legal remedies related to COVID-19 pandemic and linked restrictive measures, the network has since been engaged in monitoring and advocating for patients' rights, in particular access to family doctors and the public healthcare system.

The network was among the winners of the European Parliament European Citizens' prize in 2022.

In 2021, the LNPD coordinated the preparation for a contribution to the annual Rule of Law report from Slovenia. The 2022 Rule of Law Report explicitly mentions the work of the LNPD in the paragraph on civil society: "The Constitutional Court found that certain Government decrees severely interfere with the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and annulled them. Responding to these issues, in early 2021, four civil society organisations set up the 'Legal network for the protection of democracy', which provided legal support to individuals and organisations involved in legal proceedings due to non-violent public action. Within the network, qualified lawyers and law firms assisted to legally challenge procedures and practices considered illegal (e.g. disproportionate fines for public engagement, criminal investigations and suits for damages intended to limit criticism or pressure the civil society). By November 2021, the lawyers provided support in about one thousand cases. In May 2021, the network set up a mechanism for monitoring protests due to claims that the police used excessive force and treated the protesters selectively."

The stable source of funding remains a key issue for the civil society in Slovenia.

Objectives of the meeting

- What we want:
 - thank the network for their important work in defending democracy and the rule of law;
 - listen to their concerns about rule of law issues in Slovenia.

Main messages

On the role of civil society organisations in democracies

- Civil society organisations are one of crucial elements for the well-functioning of our democracies. They are key players contributing to overcome challenges our democracies are facing. They are also key to implementing EU policy initiatives and legislation, including in the area of fundamental rights.
- Civil society organisations strengthen the **resilience of our democracies**:
 - They play an essential role in **helping the victims of fundamental rights violations**, in particular the most vulnerable.
 - They are **essential watchdogs**, drawing attention to threats to the rule of law, to our democracies and to the conduct of free and fair elections, contributing to holding those in power accountable.
 - And they are our allies in **channelling the voice of the underrepresented**, empowering individuals in participating on matters of public interest and ensuring that all groups can express their interests and opinions.
- This is for example why our proposed anti-SLAPP package covers not only journalists, but also rights defenders, many times being NGOs. We want to ensure that you can do your work as watchdogs of democracy without fear of going through abusive lawsuits.

- Also our upcoming **Defence of Democracy package** will include a dedicated initiative aimed at increasing the support and engagement with civil society organisations. We have launched a public consultation and I invite you to give your say on this.
- We are planning specific recommendation for Member States and Civil Society organisations, including on how they should be involved in the decision-making.
- Civil society organisations' work at the local, regional, national and transnational level is a source of valuable information, resources and examples for the European Commission.
- To carry out their important role, civil society organisations need to be protected, supported, and empowered. They should work in an enabling environment where their own fundamental rights are respected and they do not face threats and attacks.

On the LPND in particular

- The work of your legal network is an important one. Successes at all levels of the courts (including constitutional) are a demonstration of quality and a confirmation that your work is indispensable.
- For this reason, we have also reflected it in the 2022 Rule of Law Report, where we have presented your legal support to people exercising their freedom of assembly in Slovenia. We have also noted your mechanism for monitoring protests.
- The 2023 Rule of Law Report is presently under preparation and will again contain a section on civil society.

- I encourage you to continue to work and would be interested to hear your views on the current rule of law and democracy situation in Slovenia.
- I would also be interested to learn more about the activities you have developed through cross-border cooperation with Polish and Hungarian colleagues facing similar challenges.

Dinner with the President of the Republic

Time: 20h00 -21h30

CV of Nataša Pirc Musar, President of the Republic of Slovenia



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