

OSCE joins criticism of Ukraine bill aimed at limiting online anti-Ukrainian content

Ukraine

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Analyst: "For as long as Ukraine is dependent on the West for its fight, it must uphold the principles and demands of the West, even if they work to its detriment."

KYIV, July 9, 2018 - A bill sponsored by a Ukrainian parliamentary committee to restrict anti-Ukrainian propaganda – sponsored by the Russian government and its mass media allies – has drawn sharp criticism from the OSCE for excessively restricting Internet access to the public. "While I share the national security concerns of Ukraine, the draft bill should entail specific and clear measures aimed at protecting the principles of transparency, proportionality and necessity, and avoid the application of overly broad and excessive measures affecting the dissemination of online content in Ukraine," said Harlem Desir, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, in a statement published on its website. "The draft law also lacks provisions ensuring effective judicial oversight and due process regarding decisions on blocking of access to services." On July, Ukraine's national security and defense committee announced that it recommends the approval of legislation that is targeted at blocking anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian websites from the public. Yet MPs from the parliamentary committee on free speech criticized the bill for overextending its appropriate reach, possibly restricting basic monitoring functions of civil society and picket-style demonstrations, the pravda.com.ua news site reported. The head of the National Union of Journalists referred to the bill as "dictator-like"; Concorde analyst Zenon Zawada added: "This is yet the latest example of the difficulty Ukraine faces in fighting a long-term, hybrid war with Russia while at the same time trying to engage in Western integration and maintain Western institutions, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press. For as long as Ukraine is dependent on the West for its fight, it must uphold the principles and demands of the West, even if they work to its detriment. "At the same time, another danger has surfaced of the Poroshenko administration, and its allies, using the pretext of fighting the war to enhance its authoritarian powers, as was alleged with the Donbas reintegration legislation. This enhanced authority could be used to affect the outcome of the 2019 elections, particularly the presidential vote in March. "With these elections coming up, we expect enough MPs will pressure the bill's authors (led by MPs of the People's Front party in the coalition government) to reduce the restrictions in the text, if it is passed at all. It makes no sense for MPs to approve legislation that will harm them during the elections."

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