



30TH BSPC: SECOND SESSION

Democracy in a changing media landscape

Speaker: **Mr Oleg Nilov**, Member of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation

- reported speech -

Chairwoman Stålhammar introduced the third speaker of this session who had been a member of the state duma of the Russian Federation since 2016. He was now the first deputy chairman of the Committee for Control and Regulation as well as a member of the Committee of Education. She yielded the screen to Mr Oleg Nilov.

Speech by Oleg Nilov, MP, State Duma, Russian Federation

Mr Nilov began by noting that it was a difficult issue they were talking about: digitalisation and democracy. These were two rather general terms, and that could lead to the opposite result of what the words actually said. Over the course of the development of digitalisation, one had to ask the question of the necessity for MPs as representatives to decide important issues in their countries. If one said, “The power belongs to the people”, “The wealth of the country belongs to the people”, and if the opportunity was given – as was the case, more or less -, citizens were allowed to make decisions and almost make laws on their own, without mediators. Important items in the budget could almost be decided by the citizens, if all these trends developed in line with democracy. Nevertheless, there was another problem in play here, he cautioned. Mr Nilov believed they had to look at where this could lead, to discuss the future.

Going back to the freedom of the media and the freedom of the press in the new reality they were living in, he pointed out that this was at the same time accompanied by the question of combatting misinformation, disinformation and fake news. In a sense, that was an oxymoron. Talking about freedom of the press and freedom of the media, that was one subject. Or one could talk about combatting the media. It was the same media, essentially. At least, the Russian side took the view that it could only be seen in relative terms. Either it was not the news or not the priorities they wished to see, or it was. It was almost like a vicious circle, Mr Nilov said, or a Gordian knot. What platforms, according to what rules, what was the meaning of freedom or of the lack of freedom? When would they decide that news were fake news? It could not just be their perspective or the perception of the citizens. This was a very tricky point. One could almost say that all of these processes, first of all, were joined together, and then there was the battle against misinformation, disinformation, lies, fake news. Mr Nilov considered it a somewhat deplorable state of affairs. It was necessary to have clear standards. He compared the situation to an infection. It was spreading, contaminating and killing many, and that was particularly true in the area of politics and the context of the media.

In that context, Mr Nilov addressed his homeland of Russia. To put it mildly, it seemed to be problem of double standards, and it was not confined to Russia. He wished to look at where the issue could be found and where examples of such things occurred. In a political sphere, obviously, but that sphere also reflected the media landscape. The problem was like trying to square a circle. People perceived things differently in their different countries. A good example was the Taliban in Afghanistan. The whole world was shaken by what had happened there. The results might well be difficult. But at some point, the Taliban had been created as a virus, created to combat the Soviets. They had been an antidote at some point, strengthened to fight against the Soviets. And they had been created, pursuing so-called reasonable ends. That had been their origin, Mr Nilov insisted, and how they had been strengthened. It was a very sad state

of affairs. It was almost like a virus that had been created in a lab, such as the situation they had in a different field, with the creation of another virus. It was depicted as a nice virus, and this was the Ukrainian Taliban. There were very different views – Russia saw it one way, European countries another way. These were the double standards that he had been talking about to measure these occurrences. That meant that social personalities, politicians and the media were assessing these issues differently – very, very differently. Here, he raised the examples of Edward Snowden and Julian Assange and how they were seen. American and European colleagues saw them as traitors and criminals, as spies. Traitors who had betrayed their countries, who had spread state secrets to the world. But if one spoke about Russian fighters against corruption or people who were actually corrupt, like Alexei Navalny, then everybody said, “No, they were in prison even though all they did was follow their conscience”. Again, very different assessments were made, depending on who one spoke to. Mr Nilov believed they would never make any progress if unified standards were not set and implemented. There were plenty of examples of this, such as Kosovo, Crimea or what was happening with the tigers in the Russian province of Yakutia. There were millions of hectares of forest that had burned, and the forest fires were continuing, even today. A year earlier, Mr Nilov had asked the BSPC to find forms for assessing the huge losses for their planet that were taking place and to the environment. He had called on them to talk about what policies impacted worse on the environment. As an example, he mentioned policies led by Greta Thunberg in terms of the reduction of carbon emissions, and she had been sorry for the poor cows, but on the other hand, they were doing nothing against the fact that the Russian forests were burning. Nor were there unifying international efforts in order to combat this evil. The green agenda simply didn't focus on these issues at all, and that was not the right way to proceed. Mr Nilov believed there were countless problems of this kind.

So, talking about the free media as a reflection of reality, it was either a mirror reflecting reality as it really was or it was a distorted mirror distorting reality as well. One could not blame the mirror for what it was reflecting. Combatting the mirror was not the way forward. What had to be done first and foremost was to talk about how they could achieve these unified standards and stop having a double standard and applying that. He called on his colleagues to think about how long it had taken to stop these double standards in terms of Russian inventions. Here, Mr Nilov spoke about the invention of the Paralympics as an example. People in Tokyo, the Russian Paralympic athletes who had been libelled for years. First, they had been allowed to compete in the Paralympics and then they had been told they were not allowed under a Russian flag in the Paralympics. But these were people with disabilities, he pointed out, people who were ill in certain cases. It could not be the case that they measured everyone the same way. These double standards had to be dropped, he underlined, or at least the limitations of policy-making had to be reflected in the mass media as well.

Mr Nilov concluded his speech at this point by referring to Omar Khayyam who had said, “Who has lived on our earth and not committed a sin,” and if anyone had lived without a sin, then they had not lived. He further quoted, “If you punish the evil that I have done by evil, What is the difference between you and me?” Responding to evil with evil did not make the responding side any better, he said. Mr Nilov very much appreciated that they could speak freely in the BSPC, expressing their ideas freely. What he would like to see was that they should be less prejudiced and biased in their

encounters with one another and be more honest with one another. Combatting the double standard had to be something that they should achieve and keep high on their agenda. He called on the BSPP to fight against russiaphobia and Russia-bashing and fake news regarding Russia. Russia was an independent nation.