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Freedom of expression is crucial in a democracy – but facts are also essential.

Victor Nabrusco's statement is heavy on opinion not on facts.

To suggest that Sergiy Tomilenko and his NUJU colleagues have capitulated to the Russian regime, to accuse him of betrayal and of legitimising the Kremlin's politics is absurd. It would be laughable if the accusations were not so serious and the distortions and lies so huge.

At meetings with international organisations, including the OSCE Sergiy Tomilenko has never missed the opportunity to expose the violations of rights of Ukrainian journalists. He has consistently fought for action, programmes and statements that defend and promote the rights of Ukrainian journalists.

He was the person behind pushing for a high-level international mission to Crimea to seek to draw more attention and force action on the plight of those whose rights have been violated by the pro-Moscow regime.

He has consistently demanded of us and the Russian Union of Journalists more practical and real action to address the issues he has raised on behalf of Ukrainian journalists. If there is fault it is ours, not his.

What Victor Nabrusco, who is the professor of the Institute of journalism in Kyiv, really takes objection to is any form of dialogue – better to sit in splendid isolation throwing insults than engage in the difficult task of using all means available to actually confront the crisis facing journalists. Dialogue is hard, sometimes it doesn't achieve results. Criticism is easy and always makes the writer feel better.

For the record, the dialogue process we have been engaged in – based on the models adapted from the conflicts in Ireland and the Balkans - has consistently sought ways to support members in the field, condemn the intimidation of journalists and manipulation of media through maintaining a professional cooperation between journalists across the conflict.

It has been supported actively by a broad range of international media freedom organisations including Reporters Without Borders, the International Press Institute, the Ethical Journalism

Network and the European Federation of Journalists. Surely the author is not suggesting that they too are tools of Russian propaganda? The UN Commissioner for Human Rights xxxxxx

The unions – often under severe political pressure – have shown great courage. The process is not easy. There are often tensions and serious disagreements but at all times NUJU and Sergiy Tomilenko have acted based on the principles that underline our profession and on areas of practical action to support and protect members.

As a result a hotline was able to help provide support and advice to journalists facing problems in Simferopol, the RUJ protested against the growing propaganda in Russian media and against the targeting and killing of journalists. The RUJ also actively campaigned to demand the leader of the Russian separatists adhere to international law in the treatment of journalists.

Under the auspices of the OSCE strong statements condemning the violence against journalists and propaganda emanating from the conflict, securing the support of the Public Collegium for Press Complaints in Russia which criticised in particular the work of Dmitry Kiselyov.

The RUJ were also able to assist in the release of jailed journalist David Geoffrion in Crimea. The OSCE assisted in the release of Olena Maksimenko and Oles Kromplyas. Joint statements between Ukrainian and Russian journalists unions about the need to free journalists detained in the so-called “Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republic” were published.

As part of the dialogue process there has been a joint collection of materials on the safety of journalists published, young journalists from Russia and Ukraine have taken part in a documentary film-making project and there has been the start of joint monitoring of hate speech.

Two Ukrainian journalists – Valery Makeyev and Roman Cheremsky – were freed directly as a result of the lobbying of the dialogue group and OSCE. One of those, Roman, has taken part in future dialogue events.

None of this work represents capitulation, betrayal or legitimising Kremlin policies. It is based solidly in international professional standards, opposing propaganda and hate speech, opposing attacks on journalists, opposing arrests, bans, harassment and targeting of journalists and promoting the safety of journalists. The NUJU colleagues have always had a principled position, raised it in every international forum and acted in line with those international standards.

Of course not all our work has been successful – far from it. Too much propaganda is still published and broadcast. Too many journalists remain exiled or detained. Too many face harassment and threats.

That is why, throughout it all Sergiy Tomilenko and his NUJU colleagues and our colleagues from IMTUU have never missed an opportunity to call on us to do more, to keep putting on more pressure to free detained journalists, tackle impunity and defend the professional rights of Ukrainian journalists.

Ukrainian journalists and media are facing multiple significant challenges. There could not be a more important time to build stronger constructive discussions, avoiding empty rhetoric and hate speech.

The IFJ and EFJ remain committed to working with Ukrainian unions and journalists to defend their rights, promote their safety and stand up for journalists and journalism.

In solidarity

Handwritten signature of Anthony Bellanger in black ink.Handwritten signature of Philippe Leruth in black ink.Handwritten signature of Ricardo Gutierrez in blue ink.

Anthony Bellanger, General Secretary, IFJ

Philippe Leruth, President, IFJ

Ricardo Gutierrez, General Secretary, European Federation of Journalists