

Contribution of The Netherlands to the debate on (social) media and democracy

By the Dutch delegation:

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Dear chair,

On behalf of the Dutch delegation I would like to thank the Canadian delegation for organizing this conference and for their wonderful hospitality. We also congratulate the rapporteurs on the report on the use of media, especially social media. It follows up our earlier IPU debates, but also on the debates at the World Democratic Forum that was held in Strassbourg just two weeks ago, which I attended on behalf of our Senate. The added value of this IPU report is that it not only addresses the possible negative effects of social media, for example on dissemination of violence or hatred or in terms of accessibility to media and information, but also the way we can use it for strengthening our democracies. The Netherlands support an open and positive attitude towards the use of social media. As the Swedish delegation already said, human rights as freedom of expression are to be realized on and off line. We need an open mind for realizing that.

The Netherlands would in that respect like to pose two questions to the rapporteurs about their report.

First, in the conclusion under article 36 of the concept resolution they state that "it requires a careful balancing of the rights of people to freedom of expression and the need to hold media, journalists and participants on social media to account". What does this mean precisely, do we want to restrict users due to accountability reasons? Why not limiting this specifically to the incitement of violence and hatred? Could we define this more precisely in this respect in order to prevent the restriction of usage and violate our freedoms online too much?

The second conclusion under article 37 of the concept resolution asks for guidelines and mechanisms for holding media and participants to account. Could the rapporteurs explain what this would mean in practice? In our opinion the problem is the message, not the medium. We would not be in favor of restricting a medium in general, especially because we talk about media that will not let themselves be regulated in general anyway. We have to restrict the message when it leads to violence or hatred.

Overall we thank the rapporteurs very much. The Dutch delegation would kindly urge them, in their preparations for the IPU conference in Quito, to specify the conclusions of the resolution in a way that secures our freedoms online as well as offline, and yet searches for precautions when it comes to incitement of violence and hatred.

Thank you very much.