



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
The Representative on Freedom of the Media  
Harlem Désir**

**Roundtable on  
the impact of artificial intelligence on freedom of expression  
Tuesday, 10 March 2020 – Vienna, Austria**

Opening remarks by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

**TO BE CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here to this roundtable in the framework of our project on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on freedom of expression, in order to discuss free speech in the age of algorithms. First, I would like to thank the experts who have traveled to come here and who have accepted to work with us on this project and, especially, the four thematic chairs who will be outlining the key challenges of the use of AI for free speech today: Martin Scheinin, who will join via video conference, Lorena Jaume-Palasi, Krisztina Rozgonyi, and Carly Kind, as well as Đorđe Krivokapić who is the main editor of the non-paper that we circulated last week. I also want to thank the other experts who are taking part in this project, including Ingrid Brodnig, who is a very well known author and expert on digital communication and freedom of speech and who joins us for this roundtable.

AI increasingly affects our daily lives. Today, machine-learning technologies directly impact how we access information, how we share personal information and how we interact with one another. As the online ecosystem has become the most participated in forum on the global level, questions around the use of AI are increasingly at the core of freedom of expression and media freedom. Today's meeting will provide a platform for such questions and discussions. As you have seen from the agenda, we plan to have only a short introduction by the four chairs of our thematic groups and then to focus on hearing from you, and your concerns, experiences and input, on both the project, as well as the non-paper that we circulated last week. We have also prepared a short surprise for you, an online survey, which the moderator Julia will present.

While everyone recognizes that AI is used increasingly as a tool to shape and arbitrate information online, we need to admit to ourselves that there is so much we do not know yet – regarding both the use, as well as the impact, of AI. We need a better understanding of the

policies and practices currently in place, and a better understanding of how they affect free speech, to be in a position to develop human-rights-friendly policies for transparency and accountability in the use of these technologies. And that's why we need to put a greater spotlight on the link and interrelation between AI and free speech.

There is no doubt about the numerous positive contributions that digital technologies can provide in expanding communications across the globe, and to enabling people to access, share and disseminate a variety of information and ideas. However, there is also a cluster of challenges associated with algorithms and AI regulating online spaces. While AI can help to address some of the security concerns of the digital era, for example by identifying terrorist content, it can also lead to censorship, particularly when it is unable to understand nuanced forms of speech, such as satire, or the difference between content that incites hatred, which is unlawful, versus the documentation of war crimes. There is a serious risk of other unintentional side effects or discrimination. Even the sheer application of these technologies is already invasive, as they rely heavily on the generation, collection, processing and sharing of large amounts of data, both about individual but also collective behavior. In addition, most of the data harvesting and algorithmic decision-making processes are deployed by internet intermediaries – which regularly constitute black boxes, with little or no transparency or accountability.

Therefore, we have to be vigilant, and we have to shine a spotlight on AI and free speech. In our AI project, my Office has identified four main areas of concern, as reflected in the non-paper.

1. The first two topics, in the framework of content moderation, concern the question of the detection and removal of specific content, namely:
  - a. The use of algorithms and AI to detect and remove security threats such as terrorist content or any other violent extremism content.
  - b. The use of AI to address hate speech.
2. In addition, in the context of content curation in the narrow sense, we will focus on the question of distribution and ranking of content and the impact of AI on pluralism and diversity.
3. Lastly, we will focus on surveillance, including the harvesting of large amounts of data by companies or by states, and the question of how this can affect freedom of expression.

As the first expert meeting here in Vienna today, we really want to put to focus on you, the participating States, on your concerns and your thinking of the main challenges. While we will hear from the experts, we will also listen to your reactions. They will shape our project's activities and focus in light of developing policy recommendations that are both tangible and useful – as well as implementable.

Thank you.