

Forum: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Issue: Tackling violations of the freedom of political expression

Student Officers: Elli Korre, Christos Mavroeidis, Antonia Dalla

Positions: Chair, Co-chair, Co-chair

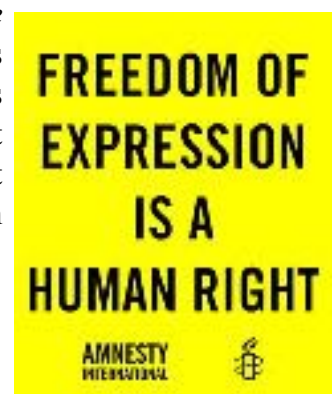
Personal Introduction

We would like to welcome you in the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the ATSMUN 2018. Tonia Dalla is a 10th grade student in Anavryta Model Lyceum. Elli Korre is studying at the Early Childhood Education Department of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and Christos Mavroeidis at the Department of Law of the Democritus University of Thrace.

The MUN Conferences which we have attended so far have been truly beneficial to all three of us. Hence, as Student Officers, our goal is to guide you before and during the Conference so that you can be collaborative, hard working and gain from this experience. Both the violations of the freedom of political expression and the labour conditions in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) concern all countries and by researching them you can shape a more mature way of thinking and propose effective measures. Evidently, it is necessary to acknowledge your country's policy especially regarding the two topics and be prepared to represent its interests while being aware of the impact that these issues have in the international community. We are aware that our Committee consists mostly of newcomers, so if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us. Our email addresses are: toniadalla2002@gmail.com, korre.elli@gmail.com, chris_mavroeidis99@hotmail.com. We expect to see you all active and look forward to meeting you!

Introducing Topic

“If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.” This phrase of George Washington does not merely explain the reason why the freedom of political expression is considered as one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, but also makes clear the reason why we should all take the violation of this right under real consideration and put a final end to this catastrophic phenomenon for our world.



Key Terms:

- Freedom of political expression:
The freedom to communicate ideas without restraint, whether orally or in print or by other means of communication.
- Article 10 European Convention on Human Rights:
Freedom of Expression:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

- Hate speech
Speech disparaging a racial, sexual, or ethnic group or a member of such a group.

Historical Information

As the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”* Freedom of political expression, one of the main human rights, has been noticed in societies long before 1948. Historical examples are the freedom of political expression in the city of Athens in ancient Greece during 5th century BC, or the so called “golden age”, where all the native citizens could exercise their political rights, and also the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) stressing the importance of freedom of speech. However, back then the political rights of some social groups, for example women, were violated.



Over the years, these violations have appeared in several forms, such as governmental control of elections, lack of free media, suppression of the freedom of assembly and association and arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters. Discrimination has been one of the causes for the violation of political rights of some groups. Many people were not allowed to vote at elections or be part of the national or local administration, so their political voices were silenced. For instance, even though the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America in 1870 guaranteed that African Americans could vote, in Southern states practices such literacy tests, poll taxes and violence have been hindering them. These violations were stopped by the Voting Rights Act in 1965, after intense efforts of the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr.

International Conventions and Treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which entered into force in 1976, have formed international standards concerning among others the freedom of speech and opinion. Despite that both UN agencies, like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for example Human Rights Watch, have been reporting such incidents in

order to spread the word about this issue and constantly attempting to eliminate it, it has not ceased to exist. Until today, this issue reemerges especially in times of political instability, fights for democracy, social justice and respect of fundamental freedoms.

In addition, it is obvious that the freedom of political expression has always been interrelated with the freedom of the media. The censorship, the detention of journalists who oppose to governmental decisions or other state affairs and the shut-down of specific television channels or websites limit the access of citizens to information and silence them. Thus, there are neither diverse political opinions nor objective presentations of the political situation and facts.

Recent suppressions have taken place in many countries. For instance, the Republic of Belarus, according to a UN special Rapporteur in 2016, remains the only European nation with only public media and has been accused for government-controlled elections. Additionally, according to Human Rights Watch, the Russian Federation has recently imposed restrictions to the online activity of its citizens, which for example has also been reported in the People's



Republic of China and the Republic of Turkey. Lately, the issue of net neutrality repeal in the United States of America has also raised important questions about the freedom of expression, because without net neutrality (i.e. the principle that Internet service providers cannot slow down or block some websites while promoting others) people will neither have access to all data nor with the same speed.

Major Countries and Parties involved

- **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):**

The OHCHR is the principal agency of United Nations for human rights and it also consists of other bodies, like the Human Rights Council (HRC). Its action is crucial for this issue, because it promotes the respect of human rights and the member states that ratify its Conventions are obliged to adhere to its regulations and report the improvements they have made.

- **European Union:**

The European Union has been promoting political and civil rights through Conventions, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), reports, as well as projects and campaigns. For example, the “No Hate Speech Movement” of the Council of Europe (2016-2017) aims at strengthening democracy online and decreasing hate while mobilizing activists and young citizens.

- **United States of America:**

In the United States of America the freedom of political expression is generally respected, people can express freely their political opinions and engage in political activities. That is why USA is one of the UN member states that could further attempt to promote these fundamental rights. However, since the presidential campaign in 2016 there have been harassment and hate speech and the political polarization has been intensified. In addition, the issue of net neutrality raises doubts regarding the future of freedom of expression and opinion online.

- **Russian Federation:**

The Russian Federation has been reported concerning its human rights violations, such as suppression of the right of assembly and association as well as assaults on freedom of speech by censorship, surveillance of the online activity of its citizens and prosecution of many because of their online posts. Human Rights Watch has also released a report in 2017 (“Russia: Assault on Freedom of Expression”) mentioning, among other violations, misinformation and propaganda by state media.

- **Republic of Turkey**

The human rights record of Turkey has been one of the main obstacles that impede its accession in the European Union. Violations such as arrests of journalists and removal of media due to criticism against the Government have repeatedly alarmed the international community. Especially after the coup d'état attempt on July 15, 2016 there have been numerous detentions of public officials, soldiers, journalists because they were allegedly linked to Fethullah Gülen.

- **People's Republic of China**

China has often been criticized for its human rights abuses. It is known that online freedom is very limited because people cannot have access to many websites and their content. Furthermore, China has been accused of maltreatment against government critics, activists, protesters. Many more measures are needed to improve its so far deteriorating human rights record.

- **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)**

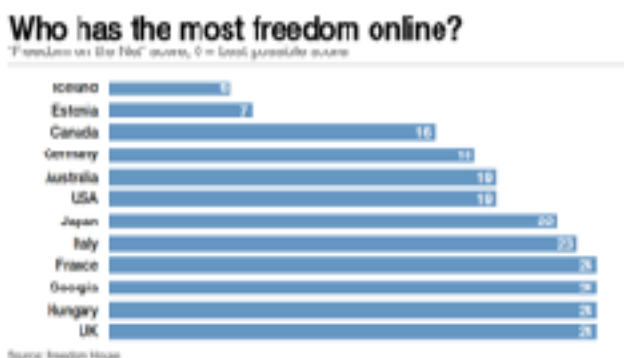
As the Article 67 of DPRK’s Constitution mentions “*Citizens are guaranteed freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, demonstration and association. The State shall guarantee conditions for the free activity of democratic political parties and social organizations.*” However, violations of human rights and among them suppression of the freedom of expression have been reported. All information is controlled and presented only by state media and the public can be informed about state operations only through them. The Internet access is also extremely restricted with all foreign websites being blocked and foreign journalists being often detained.

Timeline of Events

Dates	Events
1689	England’s Bill of Rights mentions the right of freedom of speech.
1791	Freedom of expression is recognized in the First Amendment of the US Constitution.
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
1950	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
1976	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Possible Solutions

We acknowledge that in each member-state the status of freedom of political expression differs, but apparently coordinated efforts of the international community and all parties involved are necessary. Hence, at this point we would like to mention some general propositions to help you submit specific measures that could effectively impede further suppressions.



The contribution of government officials is significant, because they are capable of offering advice to administrative members of countries in which political expression is restricted and

promoting the ratification and respect of international Conventions and standards concerning political rights. These officials should stress the importance of freedom of assembly and association and transparency in the judicial system.

Moreover, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations could enhance their efforts. More specifically, representatives could launch more campaigns for public awareness regarding this issue, encourage more people through them to take action and empower political participation. It is of utmost importance that reports continue to be published, since they describe the ongoing violations or the improvements in each member-state and thus, they indicate further needed measures. Human rights' experts appointed by international organizations could impose strict financial or other penalties to those states violating freedom of political expression to urge them respect the political rights of citizens. Members of such organizations should also continue advocating for journalists or protesters who have been detained unjustifiably.

The Internet service providers as well as the media outlets' managers should allow free access to all information and resort to the judicial system when dealing with the state's interference in media freedom. Furthermore, concerning the efforts for the elimination of hate speech, there has to be first of all an agreed and detailed definition of this term, so that they would not be indirectly used for the purpose of censorship. In addition, since social media are a crucial and wide platform to express political views, providers of such websites should continue trying to overcome obstacles limiting access to them.

In conclusion, these solutions can be the basis of the clauses included in your resolutions. Nevertheless, we expect to examine also your original suggestions and arguments about strengthening political expression worldwide.

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