



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

Safeguarding Civic Space in the Digital Age

Vienna, 11-12 May 2026

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Day 1 – Monday, 11 May

14.00 – 15.00

OPENING SESSION

Opening remarks

Ambassador Dagmar Schmidt Tartagli, Head of Human Rights, Democracy and Humanitarian Diplomacy, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Maria Telalian, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Philippe Tremblay, Director, Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM)

Anu Juvonen, Special Representative of the Chairpersonship on Civil Society

Keynote address

Technical information

15.00 – 17.00

SESSION I: Digital threats to civic space

Digitalization presents both significant opportunities and serious risks for civic space. While the digital environment has become central to the exercise of human rights, surveillance technologies targeting human rights defenders and journalists have become increasingly sophisticated, pervasive, and intrusive. Tools such as spyware, biometric surveillance, and AI enabled monitoring are used to track, intimidate, and restrict civic participation, including in the context of public assemblies. These actions often have a chilling effect, also on whistleblowers and journalists' sources, leading to self-censorship, and directly undermine the work of civil society actors. They may also translate into offline harms, including harassment and attacks, and facilitate transnational repression.

Digital threats are not limited to state surveillance but are also embedded in the business models of large online platforms, where data-driven systems enable pervasive forms of commercial surveillance. These practices can facilitate the profiling and targeting of journalists and human rights defenders, further shrinking civic space.

The session will examine the impact of digital threats and surveillance technologies on civic space, identify legal and institutional protection gaps, and discuss ways to strengthen oversight, accountability, and safeguards to protect human rights and ensure a pluralistic, independent, inclusive, and safe digital space.

Questions:

- How does digital surveillance contribute to self-censorship, and how can legal and institutional frameworks better address this chilling effect on civic space?
- How do surveillance technologies facilitate transnational repression and affect human rights defenders (in exile)?
- How are surveillance technologies, such as spyware and biometric monitoring reshaping the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, both online and offline, and what safeguards are needed to prevent their misuse during protests, civic mobilization and media coverage?
- How do digital threats and surveillance disproportionately affect women, and what responses are needed to address gender-based online violence?
- What responsibilities should private companies bear in preventing abuses, and how can stronger accountability and oversight mechanisms be enforced in the OSCE region?

[17.15 – 18.15 – side events]

Day 2 – Tuesday, 12 May

[9.00 – 10.00 – side events]

10.30 – 12.30

SESSION II: Disinformation and civic space: implications for human rights and democracy

Disinformation and co-ordinated information manipulation campaigns have emerged as significant challenges to an open and pluralistic media environment, public trust, and democratic processes. Such practices are used to discredit civil society actors and independent journalism, distort public debate, and undermine informed civic participation. At the same time, structural features of the digital information environment, particularly with reference to AI developments, can amplify the spread and impact of information manipulation. Co-ordinated disinformation campaigns are often accompanied by efforts to challenge the credibility and safety of journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors. Women journalists and human rights defenders are disproportionately targeted by online harassment, gender-based disinformation, smear campaigns and co-ordinated attacks. In the context of war and armed conflict, disinformation can be used to shape narratives, justify military aggression and distort reality.

This session will examine systemic drivers, narratives, and methods of disinformation and information manipulation in the OSCE region and assess their implications for the enjoyment of human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information. It will also explore responses aimed at countering disinformation and strengthening information integrity while safeguarding freedom of expression and civic participation.

Questions:

- How is disinformation being used specifically to target civil society actors and independent journalism, and what are the broader consequences for public trust, media freedom and democratic participation?
- How does disinformation affect women, in particular journalists, human rights defenders and politicians? What responses are needed to address gendered disinformation?
- How can disinformation also harm specific groups, including minorities, migrants and

- refugees or LGBTIQ persons, and to what extent does it reinforce existing inequalities?
- How can states and platforms counter disinformation effectively while safeguarding freedom of expression and media freedom, while avoiding measures that could be misused to restrict legitimate speech?
- What role can independent journalism and media self-regulation play in strengthening information integrity in the current information environment?

[13.15 – 14.15 – side events]

14.30 – 16.30 **SESSION III: Strengthening digital resilience for the protection of civic space**

Addressing digital threats requires both systemic and operational responses. Digital resilience depends on effective legal and policy frameworks, robust institutional safeguards, and strengthened multilateral and multi-stakeholder co-operation. It also requires practical tools that enable independent media and civil society actors to prevent, respond to, and recover from digital threats in their daily work. This session will examine existing initiatives aimed at strengthening digital resilience and explore opportunities for enhanced cooperation. It will further assess how resilience can be reinforced at both the level of individual actors and across the wider information ecosystem. Particular attention will be given to how digital resilience can be operationalized in practice through targeted training, capacity-building, and accessible tools, especially in high-risk and resource-constrained environments.

Questions:

- What practical safeguards or interventions can better protect civil society actors and journalists in their daily work?
- How effective are existing multilateral and multi-stakeholder initiatives in strengthening digital resilience? And how can cooperation between the OSCE and these initiatives be enhanced?
- What does “strengthening digital resilience” look like in high-risk or constrained environments?
- How can digital resilience strategies better integrate psychosocial support and wellbeing, and what role should donors and partners play in ensuring this support is sustained and accessible?

16.30 – 17.30 **CLOSING SESSION**

Reports from the working sessions

Statements by participating States

Closing remarks:

Philippe Tremblay, Director, Office of the RFoM

Tea Jaliashvili, First Deputy Director, ODIHR

Nicolas Plattner, Deputy Head of Mission, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the OSCE

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