



**WAN-IFRA is the World Association
of News Publishers**

Our mission is to protect the rights of journalists and publishers around the world to operate independent media. We provide our members with expertise and services to innovate and prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in society.

With formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, WAN-IFRA derives its authority from a global network of leading news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs, and its legitimacy from 80 national association members representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries.

www.wan-ifra.org

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His Excellency President Volodymyr Zelensky
President of Ukraine
Kiev, Ukraine

Via email

8 April 2020

Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, to express our concern at the bill proposed by Culture Minister, Volodymyr Borodyanskyi, in January of this year that would criminalise the dissemination of disinformation.

While we agree that disinformation is a problem for society and understand your government's wish to protect your citizens from potentially harmful false information, we believe that this bill – in its present form - poses significant risks to freedom of expression in Ukraine.

The bill lacks a clear definition of disinformation, which we fear leaves it vulnerable for use by authorities to suppress legitimate news and information. The creation of a government-appointed 'ombudsman for information' has the potential to give too much control to the state regarding the work of the press. The high penalties and criminal responsibility for disseminating false information are also concerning and could well have a chilling effect on legitimate journalism.

We second the concerns of Harlem Desir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, that the draft law could lead to broad state interference in media and journalism activities "at the expense of media freedom," and that it will not be efficient to counter disinformation.

We call upon the government to allow time and space for broader consultation with the journalism community on these questions, noting the concerns that have been expressed by



various bodies representing the industry, including the Ukrainian Media Business Association, the Association of Independent Regional Publishers of Ukraine, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and the Independent Media Trade Union of Ukraine.

We urge you, Mr. President, to take these concerns into consideration as the bill progresses through Parliament. We would encourage you to draw upon them as a means to ensure a more effective piece of legislation that also ensures greater protections for the right to freedom of expression, as defined in international law and outlined under the various covenants governing this to which Ukraine is a signatory.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. De Yarza'.

Fernando De Yarza Lopez-Madrado
President, WAN-IFRA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Warren Fernandez'.

Warren Fernandez
President, World Editors Forum