

Austria Chairmanship 2017 - HDIM Speech on FoM

Thank you Mr. Moderator

Austria fully aligns herself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

In addition I would like to make a few remarks, in my national capacity, on this topic, a priority area for Austria, including during its OSCE Chairmanship next year.

The safety of journalists is a key issue in the overall agenda of ensuring freedom of expression and free media in the OSCE region; and the issue of impunity is still one of the major threats to this fundamental right.

We are alarmed by the continuing high number of attacks, threats, intimidation, and harassment of journalists, and that many attacks and murders go unpunished, as reported by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

When journalists are attacked, we must condemn, investigate, and bring masterminds and perpetrators of such crimes to justice.

This is a first step, in allowing journalists, including bloggers and citizen reporters to act independently, without undue interference, and free from fear and intimidation.

Austria will continue to also raise this important issue at the UN. In September 2014, the UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 27/5, drafted by Austria, which provides concrete recommendations on how to better guarantee safety and ensure there is no impunity.

This Resolution was an important step forward in our joint effort to protect journalists around the world. And it should serve as a best practice for future collaborative initiatives on journalists' safety. Not least because we – the OSCE participating States - need to do more.

We recognized decades ago the need to fight impunity of violence committed against journalists. In 1994, we, the OSCE pSs, agreed upon a commitment condemning “all attacks on, and harassment of, journalists” and pledging to “endeavour to hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable.”

We hope that the UN Human Rights Council will adopt at its ongoing session in Geneva a new resolution again under Austrian lead, unequivocally condemning all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers, the specific attacks on women journalists in the exercise of their work, including sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation and harassment, online and offline, as well as reinforcing the commitment by States to prevent violence and ensure accountability. It is the responsibility of all States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference, for instance through protecting journalistic sources.

Despite a clear OSCE commitment, in many parts of our region the safety of journalists is still far from guaranteed. According to IPIs death watch, 21 journalists have been killed in 2015 because of their profession in the OSCE region alone While this horrible trend seems not to

be repeated by this year's record, the reality shows that no country is safe from this threat. Furthermore, the issue still does not receive the attention it deserves.

We are also alarmed by the growing number of reports about female journalists being singled out and attacked in social media. Austria supported a UNESCO study to address these very specific threats against female journalists, which are very harmful to media pluralism and gender equality alike.

Another issue of particular concern to Austria is the right to free expression whilst combatting legitimate security concerns:

Criminals are undoubtedly taking advantage of an open and free internet, to spread hateful propaganda and incite crimes. For terrorists, it is a platform to recruit and radicalise new members, and communicate more easily. Yet, an open and accessible internet is also essential to exercise the basic rights of free expression and free media. We must find ways to tackle these legitimate security concerns without undue restrictions on our fundamental rights.

The challenge of our time is to understand that security is a component of human rights. Without the full enjoyment of human rights, there is no security. It will therefore be important that countries will regularly undergo the exercise to evaluate their level of respect for human rights with regard to the internet freedom. Austria is committed to defend the enabling environment for internet freedom.

With this in mind, we would like to offer the following **three recommendations to participating States**:

First of all, to condemn all attacks on the media, and to ensure that through swift and transparent investigations, perpetrators and masterminds of such crimes are brought to justice as a signal to society that such crimes are not tolerated.

Secondly, periodically include the evaluation of the level of respect for human rights with regard to the Internet in relevant national reports, to ensure that any and all counter-terrorism measures restricting the right to free expression and free media are in compliance with international standards, most notably Article 19 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and strictly adhere to the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality and are implemented in accordance with the rule of law.

Thirdly, and overall, to recognise the overarching need for free speech, including critical and dissident voices (online and offline), for the functioning of a democratic society.

Let me conclude by commending the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic, and her very able team for their important work and continued efforts in guiding us, and calling us out where we need to do better.

Austria will continue to support the work of this important Institution, and intends to work closely with the Representative during its Chairmanship to help progress our common goal of ensuring free expression and safety of journalists in the OSCE region.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.