



**Speech for the 3rd Committee of the OSCE PA
(General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions)
25th February 2022**

**Special debate focused on the topic of
'Journalism as a precondition for justice and rule of law'**

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro

Dear Excellencies, dear members of the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions,

It is my privilege to be here amongst you today, in a very difficult time for our common region, our organization and our common security.

We are not on the brink of war anymore, the Russian Federation has launched a full-scale military operation against Ukraine, against a sovereign state and a participating State of the OSCE.

This violates not only our common OSCE commitments and the very principles on which our Organization is based upon. It also violates international law and will cause immense human suffering.

I want to focus my intervention today on the consequences and threats to journalists and media in Ukraine, and across the region, in accordance with my mandate.

The free flow of information is essential at all times. But it becomes *vital* at times of crises.

The role of free, independent and impartial media is of utmost importance in order to report on developments on the ground. This is even more true in conflict situations.

It is fundamental that we receive impartial and independent coverage of the situation on the ground, verified information in order to have a clear picture of what is going on.

This must involve a variety of sources. It is unacceptable that the Russian Media Regulator Roskomnadzor instructed media to use only information and data provided by official Russian sources when reporting on the military operation against Ukraine.

Hundreds of journalists and media workers, foreign and national, are at the moment on the ground across Ukraine, reporting on the alarming developments and putting themselves in enormous danger. Their rights and their safety need to be respected and protected. For their own sake, for the sake of truth and for the sake of information as a public good.

The first casualty of war is often truth, and we have seen both attempts of deliberate spreading of disinformation and of censorship in the current situation. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media need to be upheld, also in these difficult times.

At the same time, Article 20 of the ICCPR states clearly that propaganda for war of aggression shall be prohibited. Propaganda for war and hatred imposed on the media by governments or proxies contributes to the escalation of violence and discredits journalism as a profession that serves the public interest.

Propaganda for war is an act of aggression itself. In the Helsinki Final Act, all participating States committed themselves to refrain from propaganda for war. I want to underline that this includes “propaganda against peace”, which the UN General Assembly condemned already in 1950 as “measures tending to isolate the peoples from any contact with the outside world”.

We have to ensure the free flow of *independent* news and information. We need to stand in solidarity with journalists and media workers in Ukraine.

The safety of journalists and the right to cover developments independently and without fear of retaliation is crucial, including in times of conflict. There can be no peace or security without media freedom.

This year, we celebrate the fact that 25 years ago the participating States created the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The participating States understood very well the crucial role of media freedom for peace and stability in the region – something that rings as true today as it did back then.

Therefore, our slogan for this year’s 25th Anniversary is: “There is no security without media freedom.”

But it is not just a slogan; it reflects our reality today. And I thank Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov for reminding us about its implications and intertwining nature just now.

Let me now come back to this session’s topic of journalism as a precondition for justice and rule of law, two important bedrocks of democratic societies. But unfortunately, many journalists in our region do not only face the threat of physical and online violence, but also have to fear a threat of legal harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, or other abuse of the judicial system.

Such intimidations and attacks against the safety of journalists are intended to suppress journalists' essential work to inform the public – and to hold power to account, which is an essential element of justice and rule of law as well.

As described in the recent report of my Office on this topic, this risk comes in many forms, ranging from administrative sanctions or criminal prosecution, to civil litigation by powerful individuals and organisations – a phenomenon that is often called Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, or SLAPP's.

Such legal harassment can pose a serious threat to the safety and the economic basis of media and, hence, has a strong chilling effect on pluralism. The Maltese reporter Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was murdered in October 2017, had over 40 lawsuits filed against her by officials, companies and individuals.

With the adoption of the Ministerial Council Decision in 2018, the OSCE participating States reconfirmed their commitment to ensure the safety of journalists, including legal safety. That was over three years ago, and since then the problem has only increased.

As part of a new project on the Safety of Journalists that my Office and I will launch in the coming weeks, we will further our work on the issue of legal harassment and abuse of the judicial system.

We will build on the recommendations in our special report, providing guidance on how to improve the media's legal safety. Parliamentarians can play a crucial part in ensuring the safety of journalists, and protecting the right to freedom of expression for everyone.

In this regard, it is essential to adopt a gender-responsive and intersectional approach. Since 2015, my Office is working on the safety of female journalists online, through the SOFJO project.

Based on my Office's SOFJO Resource Guide and on the report by the PA's Gender Rapporteur, Dr. Fry on *Violence against Women Journalists and Women Politicians*, we strengthened the cooperation of our institutions. I hope to work closely with all of you throughout this year.

As a first step, towards more effective preventive and protective mechanisms for women journalists, we will send out a brief questionnaire to all of you. Based on the results and needs assessment, my Office and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will enable an exchange of good practices to foster initiatives for improved regulatory frameworks and measures for the safety of women journalists.

This joint initiative will include several events throughout 2022. We will follow-up with more information next week, but you can already now find the survey in the chat.

I count very much on your co-operation and I look forward to today's discussion.

I thank you for your attention.