



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Dunja Mijatović

*Introductory remarks by Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
at the Press Emblem Campaign awards, 4 June 2015*

Dear Ambassadors, Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here today and to be given the opportunity to speak before you on such an important subject as media freedom and journalists' safety in times of conflict. Let me first thank the Press Emblem Campaign and the city of Geneva for organizing this timely event and focusing on a core media freedom issue: journalists' safety.

As the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, one advocating and working for media freedom throughout the OSCE's 57 participating States, I am honoured to be one of the recipients of the PEC Prize for the Protection of Journalists. I see this award as a tribute to all journalists and media freedom advocates around the world trying to shine light from the dark corners of the world.

One of these individuals is my co-recipient of the PEC award 2015, Liudmyla Zlobina. She is in my mind the true winner of this prize. As the Director of the Crimean Center for Investigative Reporting within the Information Press Center (IPC), she has contributed immensely to the crucial job of shining a light on the very difficult media freedom situation in eastern Ukraine.

Without NGOs like the IPC, without their dedicated work, their critical efforts and their in-depth knowledge, the rest of us would live in an information vacuum, unaware of the terrible media situation in Crimea and elsewhere in eastern Ukraine.

Independent media faces many challenges across the OSCE region but nowhere is the media freedom situation as challenging as in and around Ukraine. Since events began more than 18 months ago on the streets of Kyiv, journalists and journalism itself has been under attack as a consequence.

My Office has kept a close eye on media in the region since the conflict started and for anyone following the developments it is clear that journalists have been targeted on a grand scale. I have issued various reports detailing most of the attacks – the killings, beatings, harassment of every kind:

- At least 10 media members have been killed – 3 in Kyiv and 7 in eastern Ukraine;
- About 200 journalists have been attacked and injured, though some sources put the number much higher;
- At least 30 editorial offices and television stations have been vandalized;
- About 80 journalists have been abducted and detained;
- Practically all Ukrainian channels have been switched off and replaced with Russian channels in territories controlled by separatists;

Attacks of any kind are simply not acceptable. Journalists' safety must be guaranteed at all times and those responsible for crimes against journalists must be brought to justice to prevent an environment of intimidation, fear and impunity from taking hold.

But we also face an enemy that may have the power to destroy all we hold dear – the uncontrolled proliferation of propaganda. Propaganda is another ugly scare on the face of modern journalism. And in the battles in and around Ukraine, it rages unabated.

Propaganda is especially dangerous when it dominates the public domain and crowds out real news, thereby distorting the marketplace of ideas. And state media is the main vehicle of propaganda.

Governments, wherever they own media outlets directly or by proxy, must stop corrupting the profession; stop spreading propaganda. Because in the absence of real, critical journalism, democracy suffers and deliberate disinformation is the daily standard.

A quick fix to solve the problem of propaganda does not exist. On the contrary, the complexity of propaganda requires a multifaceted solution involving a number of actors,

ranging from international organizations, government authorities and academia to journalists and journalist associations. In order to stop manipulating media; to stop information and psychological wars, we must:

- Ensure media plurality and free media as an antidote to propaganda;
- Refrain from introducing new restrictions; existing laws can deal with extreme propaganda;
- Invest in media literacy for citizens to make informed choices;
- Reform state media into genuine public service broadcasting;

But I also believe it is time for journalists themselves, along with their professional associations and self-regulatory bodies, to take a long, hard look in the mirror and evaluate their role and consider the content they are producing. The propaganda evident in media today does a disservice to all credible, ethical journalists who have fought for and, in some cases, given their lives to produce real news.

The main issue that my office deals with, in Ukraine and elsewhere, and the biggest challenge to media freedom is journalists' safety. The question we should ask ourselves is how we can ensure freer, more independent and safer working conditions for journalists. I wish that there was a single, perfect answer to this question. There is not. But I think we all can agree on the basics.

Among them is impunity. And another is dealing with the fact that, in many cases, it is the authorities themselves who are giving approval to commit acts of violence. What signal does it send when police routinely round up media and throw them in jail on trumped-up charges? What signal does it send when law enforcement officers raid editorial offices?

But there are ways forward. With straight-forward and simple recommendations on how to enhance journalists' safety we can come a long way. And they do exist. Let me just briefly mention a few recommendations that my Office has advocated for during the years:

- Journalists' safety could be improved by eliminating the statute of limitations on assaults and killings, and to carry out effective investigations bringing those responsible to justice.

- If journalists are put in prison, investigations should likewise be completed swiftly, and if not found guilty by a competent, independent court, journalists should be released.
- Law enforcement officers should respect the right of journalists to report on various issues, and not arrest or confiscate equipment.
- These simple recommendations could vastly improve the working conditions for journalists around the world.

It remains my firm belief that the joint efforts of international organizations, journalist associations and concerned legislators, together with political will, can improve the current situation. And there is reason for cautious optimism.

Just last week I attended an event at the United Nations in New York devoted to protection of journalists, and I got the opportunity to witness the passing of the UN Security Council's Resolution 2222. Adopted unanimously, the resolution condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in conflict areas.

The resolution serves as a reminder of what international organizations can do to put focus on journalists' safety around the world. Let this also be a beacon for the international community, we need more joint efforts to keep this crucial issue for media freedom on the agenda globally.

Thank you.