



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Harlem Désir**

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working session on media freedom
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Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

I welcome you at the first working session of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

We are sure, with your collective knowledge and expertise here in this room, to take a thorough look today at the situation of freedom of expression and media freedom in the OSCE region.

It is good to see how many of us came to Warsaw: representatives of governments, human rights NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, media outlets, editors, journalists and bloggers.

But many who wanted to be here, and who should be free to participate in our discussion, are not with us today. Over 170 journalists cannot attend, as they are in prison because of their critical writing. Hundreds of other journalists, media workers and media freedom activists cannot attend because they currently face severe criminal charges or are intimidated by attacks and harassment for their work.

Their voices are missing here. I have them in mind now, in my first annual speech to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the speech “on the status of the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in respect of freedom of expression and free media in OSCE participating States”, as my Mandate describes its essence.

Today is September 11, or 9/11. On this day, we all remember that sixteen years ago, we have entered into a new world of threats and terrorism after the horrendous attacks in New York.

A terrorism that also hit many journalists in the past years and here I want to pay tribute to the editorial team and cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo in my country.

But this year, 9/11 will not only be a day of remembrance, it also marks for the press the resumption of a major trial against journalists. And the paradox is that they are tried, accused of terrorism while they are just doing their work.

As we speak, 20 journalists and editorial board members from the daily newspaper Cumhuriyet stand on trial in Silivri. They are famous for their writings against authoritarian tendencies, speaking out in defending an open society. We know and value them for their critical analysis of developments in their country and abroad. The accused, six of them under arrest since 2016, now face prison sentences ranging from 7.5 to 43 years.

One of them, Kadri Gürsel, attended the HDIM only two years ago as the distinguished guest of my Office. He spoke about the difficulties that journalism faced in his country, and urged for international attention to the immense pressure exercised on many of his fellow journalists in Turkey. Ironically enough, he was invited and spoke at the OSCE Expert workshop on engaging with the media in countering terrorism in Vienna, in October 2009.

Kadri Gürsel, Ahmet Sik and other prominent colleagues in prison, they symbolize the very values that we are protecting when combatting terrorism: a democratic society, pluralism, free speech, the freedom to agree or disagree with others, including your government.

In the past years, in some countries, journalists have been the double victims of terrorism.

First, as direct targets of terrorists, because they speak freely and refuse to give in to extremists.

But also, because the fight against terrorism, which is absolutely necessary, has led to disproportionate restrictions of freedom of the media. Beyond the legitimate goal to protect safety of citizens and national security, some laws and rules aimed not at terrorists but at critical voices labeled as dangerous just because they are free.

Let us repeat it here, as clearly as my three predecessors, Freimut Duve, Miklos Haraszti and Dunja Mijatović:

The protection of freedom of expression is an essential element in our efforts to fight terrorism. It is through guaranteeing media freedom and pluralistic public discourses, through keeping our journalists free, that the public can be alert and informed.

Open and free media offer the space for the discussion of opinions. They uncover hidden tensions in society that could otherwise escalate. They help to find solutions for challenges in a peaceful way. They hold government to account, and help to establish the trust that public authorities need to succeed in governing safe and secure societies we wish to live in.

It is my strong belief that there are no strong societies with weak media.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are facing hard times for freedom of the media. And sometimes, participating States question the action of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

I must recall that I act on the basis of the commitments taken by the OSCE participating States themselves and the mandate they gave me to observe, alert and promote their implementation.

These commitments are strong and they are part of the comprehensive concept of security of the OSCE in which freedom of the media is a contribution to peace, security, good relationships among the participating States.

Participating States can be proud of these commitments but they have to be implemented.

Let me recall their foundation, just to mention a few:

- In 1975, in the Helsinki Final Act, the Governments emphasized the essential and influential role of media and journalists in our efforts to understand each other and build peace and co-operation in Europe and confidence between our peoples;
- In 1991 in Moscow, the countries committed that any restrictions to freedom of expression need to be prescribed by law in accordance with international standards, and conform to strict tests of necessity and proportionality;
- In 1994, in Budapest, the participating States condemned all attacks on and harassment of journalists and decided to endeavour to hold those accountable who are directly responsible for such attacks;
- In 2004, in Sofia, the participating States agreed to take action to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of expression, and to foster access to the Internet;
- In 2014, in Basel, the countries have reaffirmed that freedom of information contributes to preventing and combating corruption and the financing of terrorism.

These commitments all apply offline and online.

It is my core responsibility to alert authorities when commitments may not be respected, and it remains the core responsibility of the authorities to hear this alarm and, whenever needed, to revise their approach.

I stand here, ready to work with you all, to help designing changes for the better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My first priority will be the safety and protection of journalists, and the fight to end impunity of crimes committed against them.

When looking at the threats to media freedom, let me recall a few observations on the state of free media in the OSCE region in the past year:

- Several journalists have lost their lives in connection with their work, in the OSCE region since the last HDIM a year ago. Among them are Martin Kok in the Netherlands, Nikolay Andruschenko and Dmitry Popkov in the Russian Federation, and Swedish journalist Kim Wall in Denmark.
- The number of threats against individual journalists, and also against media outlets, reached a record high in 2016. Human rights NGOs have been sounding the alarm. According to the last annual report of Reporters without Borders several participating States have gone down in their world rankings.
- As already mentioned, over 170 journalists are in prison today. Over 90% of them are behind bars in Turkey, on terrorism charges. They include Turkish and foreign journalists and we ask for the release of Deniz Yucel, Mesale Tolu and Loup Bureau and for the release of the Cumhuriyet team.

We also see a sharp increase of intimidation and harassment of female journalists.

We continue to see a lack of progress in fighting impunity. In over 90% of the cases of violence against journalists in the OSCE region, the perpetrators and masterminds know that they will manage to avoid facing justice.

My second priority will be to protect media freedom in the new security context.

I already spoke of the impact of 9/11 on media freedom in the OSCE region. I can also add that recent overreaching surveillance efforts, routinely justified in the name of national security, and coercion by law enforcement to release confidential sources of media workers also result in weakening investigative journalism.

Anti-terrorism laws, adopted in an effort to increase national security, often include vague terms which are misused to restrict free expression and criminalize behavior arbitrarily identified as “terrorist activity” or “extremism” or “endorsement of terrorism”.

I fully support the efforts of governments to combat terrorism and create safer societies, but let me repeat this simple fact: there are ways to achieve these goals without compromising on our hard-fought fundamental freedoms.

My **third priority** will be to engage governments and media professionals in the debate on the need to address threats of disinformation, “fake news,” propaganda, and hate speech. They affect trust and co-operation between and within our nations, and endanger security. I am particularly worried when these negative phenomena are sponsored by governments through state-run media or by proxy.

“Fake news” and propaganda are dangerous not only to the political climate but also to the public trust in media and its readiness to protect media freedom. My predecessor called it an ugly scar on the face of the profession. My office will publish a follow-up non-paper “Fake News and Freedom of the Media”.

We will also continue with other related projects, including the dialogue between journalists from Ukraine and the Russian Federation; as well as the Cyprus Dialogue between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot journalists.

My **fourth priority** will be to promote media pluralism in the OSCE region through promoting best policy practices in the rapidly digitizing media landscape, and warning against illiberal approaches.

As I already mentioned, technology has brought revolutionary changes in the media business and thus to the profession itself. Today the competition among the media brought social media as the winners. This also results in unprecedented cuts in editorial offices, worsening working conditions for journalists and the decline of traditional media, in particular in smaller towns and rural areas across the OSCE region.

There is also a crisis in understanding – first of all among governments – of the public service media and its role as the centerpiece of the media in democratic societies, allowing all voices to be heard, independent of commercial considerations. Public service media should remain financially sustainable and at the same time independent from governments and businesses, as a model for other media.

Further forms of limiting media pluralism include denying state advertisements to critical media outlets or other forms of exposing the media to economic difficulties. They have already resulted in weakening content pluralism in some other participating States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These four priorities will be discussed at the annual regional media conferences that my Office will continue with the generous help of the OSCE participating States.

To implement my Mandate, my dedication and that of my team will not be enough. My office relies on support from the authorities of the OSCE participating States, on the outstanding work done by civil society.

Once again, I am honored that you are here with us today, and I wish to express my deep gratitude for your invaluable contribution to media freedom in our OSCE region.

I thank the governments of Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United States for their important support with generous extra-budgetary donations. Without this, we could not implement our projects that play an essential role in our efforts to improve media freedom in the OSCE region.

In this regard allow me also to emphasize that recent OSCE Chairs of Lithuania, Ireland, Ukraine, Serbia, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria have kept media and Internet freedom, safety of journalists and pluralism high on our Organization's agendas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let's think about the journalists in prison. They know we are here. We have a duty towards them. They have the right to work freely as journalists, even if their government is not pleased with their articles. Journalists have the right to work and to interview people without running the risk of being confused with their subjects.

We defend media freedom because we know that without journalists, the world turns into a grim place, where the powerful can act as they wish, and where citizens have to be afraid. Instead, we need to work relentlessly and ambitiously, and without ever giving up, towards societies based on rights of people, in a sustainable and peaceful development – in short, we have to make a living reality out of the OSCE basic principles. That's what we are here for today, and that's what we will work for in the coming years.

Thank you for your attention.