

Working Session 6

Fundamental freedoms I, including address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Lithuania

In full alignment with the EU statement, we would like to add several remarks in our national capacity.

As we heard today in the discussions, regrettably, journalists themselves are becoming a part of the news as they are persecuted, abducted, or even killed. More than 100 journalists and media workers are killed every year globally, including the OSCE region. On average, only 1 in 10 investigations of murders of journalists has resulted in prosecution. Statistics like this prove that journalists' safety, and not only in war zones, must become a high priority for all of us.

Political commitments of the governments to protect freedom of the media are important. But without effective and timely prosecution and punishment of all those responsible for crimes against journalists, nothing will change. As the RFoM has stressed rightly, it is not enough for governments to just claim support for the work of the media publicly, we need to show it with our deeds and first of all – to uphold and even strengthen the existing OSCE commitments.

Throughout the year in a number of the OSCE events on war propaganda and disinformation organised by the CiO, the RFoM as well as interested countries and media experts expressed concern regarding the role of the media in conflicts, when media is becoming integral part of the armoury, or could be portrayed as artillery, which clears the field in the minds of societies for military actions. The continuing Russian military assault on Ukraine demonstrates how media, when it's not free, can be easily subjected by the State for the realisation of its aggressive policy.

Another worrisome trend is the labelling of journalists as terrorists. We are very concerned by the decision of Russian authorities to include in the published "list of terrorists and extremists" journalists and media actors, namely Crimean journalist Mykola Semena from the *Krym-realii* online media, and Anna Andrievskaya from the *Centre for Journalistic Investigations*. They were labelled as terrorists only because they openly disagreed with the Russian annexation policy in Crimea.

We can only echo the words of the RFoM Dunja Mijatović who stated that *“it’s the government’s responsibility to ensure journalists’ safety; it should not put them in harm’s way based on state prosecutors’ suspicions under an anti-extremism law”*.

From its part, Lithuania is strongly committed to the cause of the protection of journalists. Last year Lithuania initiated the UN Security Council resolution on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts, which was adopted without voting. Among other things, resolution 2222 urged UN member-states to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel working in war zones. The resolution also stressed the specific threats faced by women journalists in the line of duty. Female journalists and bloggers are increasingly subjected to threats of sexual violence and are, now more than ever, especially vulnerable. We actively support the efforts of the RFoM in bringing these issues to the OSCE agenda.

It is essential to translate resolution 2222 into concrete actions aimed at developing comprehensive measures to address the safety of journalists, especially at the regional level. The OSCE community should assume more responsibilities in this regard by developing new and strengthening existing commitments on safety of journalists and freedom of expression, including countering war propaganda. Therefore, Lithuania is ready to support the transformation of the initial Chairmanship’s initiatives into the comprehensive Ministerial decisions.