

**OSCE CiO Conference on the  
Protection of Safety and Integrity of Journalists in the OSCE Region  
26-27 March 2015, Belgrade**

**Opening remarks by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media  
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Dear Ministers, Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today, at an event that tackles the single most important task of my Office.

Improving the safety of journalists.

Safety of journalists is a term that all of us hear every day in our work. We discuss it, we reaffirm its importance, participating States attempt year after year to pass a new commitment on it, and in the process my Office continues to urge all countries to do more, much more, and much faster, to ensure it.

But how often do we stop and think about what these words really mean? What does safety of journalists mean to those whose physical safety is indeed compromised; those who leave for work knowing that they, or their loved ones, can get harassed, attacked, beaten, and sometimes even killed for doing their job.

Or to those who find themselves in armed conflicts. The conflict in and around Ukraine is a terrible reminder of the many ways that journalists can be threatened or can get harmed for trying to report under very difficult conditions.

And this is not only about physical safety: many journalist also face the risk of being arbitrarily detained and imprisoned, on the grounds of disproportionate media legislation or fabricated charges.

In most professions we take it for granted that we can work in safety, without fear of threats, intimidations, beatings or other forms of attacks.

But here, today, I ask you to stop and imagine that this is not the case. That you go to work, not knowing if you, or your family, will be well at the end of the day.

To most of us this notion is simply unimaginable. It is so uncomfortable, and it creates so much fear, that we rather start treating it as an abstract idea. As a theoretical problem. An issue where it is really high time that we passed a new commitment.

But there are some among us here today who know very well what lack of safety feels like. And they still leave for work, and continue reporting about public issues, because they believe that information should be available for everyone.

I am very honoured that you are here with us today.

Almost no year goes by in the OSCE region without journalists paying with their lives for writing about issues of public importance.

And there are years, including the last one, and the tragic start of this year, when the list of journalists who died during their work gets longer at a terrifying rate.

We are also familiar with the many beatings that take place, causing not only physical but also psychological pain for a long time.

And what about other, less tangible forms of violence? How do we handle those cases where there are no bruises, where no explosions take place and when no lives are lost?

How do we raise attention to violence that creeps in more quietly, that is impossible to point to, and thus impossible to directly address?

Last year we worked together with the Commission for the Investigation of Murders of Journalists in Serbia to raise awareness of the threats faced by journalists. Unfortunately the threats and the messages from this campaign continue to be relevant throughout the OSCE region and the video shows real threats that journalists have received.

It is of great concern that censorship of critical voices remains strong in several areas of the OSCE, including South Eastern Europe, and within it our host country Serbia. It is of utmost importance that the authorities face this problem, instead of denying it; acknowledging widespread censorship is the first step in stopping this dangerous trend.

We all know of journalists who stop writing critically on issues of public importance. What we often do not know is why. And we do not know how we would react if we were in their shoes.

What do we do when a journalist stops writing because someone walked up to them and asked if they knew where their daughter was at that time? Or if they wanted to see their family again.

There is psychological violence, which is less discussed and very difficult to show, but which affects journalists every day. And we need to be very well aware of its power to silence when discussing safety of journalists.

I thank Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić, and Minister of Culture and Information Ivan Tasovac, for opening this event and, with their presence, raising attention to the very important topic we are here to discuss.

I also thank the Serbian Chairmanship for their commitment to safety of journalists by placing the issue so high among their priorities for this year.

We now have almost two days at our disposal to share our views and experiences on this issue, and depart with specific ideas and initiatives that can help bring us closer to the day when the work of the journalists will no longer be labelled dangerous.

At the end of this conference, this is what we need – to find ways to better protect journalists.

When we look at the agenda, it is my hope that we will do exactly that. We will look at the impact of the terrible shootings in Paris on the work of journalists and on freedom of expression in general; we will discuss the growing number of threats against female journalists and why it is so important for the authorities to decisively act against them right now; we will discuss ways to defend media outlets and journalists against hacker attacks; and we will discuss the legal

requirements to effectively safeguard safety of journalists and thus media freedom and freedom of expression.

I look forward to the discussions. I wish all of us a lively debate and motivating dialogues.

Let me emphasize one more thought before I conclude.

In every profession there are those who do their job well, and those who do not. There are journalists who write well, and there are journalists who do not. There are journalists who help us become informed about issues that directly affect our lives, and there are journalists who push for a specific agenda or simply write badly.

But they all write. They all report. They draw cartoons. It is up to us, the readers, to decide what we do with their work.

What we need to remember, however, is that words and pictures do not cause bruises, and they do not kill people. Attacks and murders are carried out by criminals, who need to face the immediate and full rigour of the law for their terrible actions.

My stand remains very simple. Violence against those holding a different opinion is unacceptable. Violence for written words, for reports or for drawings can not be tolerated.

And it is up to the authorities, including the highest representatives of our countries, to publicly and immediately denounce violence, or the threat of

violence against journalists, and urge for transparent and swift investigations in each and every case.

So now that we open this conference, I ask all of us to switch perspective, and in the next one and a half days participate in the discussions by imagining that it is our physical safety, or the safety of our most loved ones, that we are trying to improve.