



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 2: Freedom of the Media (1 of 2)

As prepared for delivery by Amb. Michael Kozak, Head of Delegation
Warsaw, September 11, 2018

I thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Desir, for his dedication to carrying out his vital mandate throughout the OSCE region. The United States values press freedom as a key component of democratic governance. Journalists shine a light on many issues: keeping citizens informed, prompting robust debate and discussion, and holding governments – including our own – accountable.

The United States stands for the safety of journalists in our own country and around the world. We recognize the considerable risks that journalists often face in the conduct of their profession. Violence against journalists hits close to home. In June, my own country suffered a terrible loss when five employees of the *Capital Gazette* were shot to death at their offices in Annapolis, Maryland. The alleged shooter, who had a grudge against the newspaper, is in custody facing 23 criminal indictments, including five counts of murder.

In this session, the United States will focus on the most egregious attempts to intimidate the press into silence: violent attacks, including murder, often with impunity.

Russia stands out in the OSCE region for its long history of impunity for the killings of journalists. After all these years, we still call for justice in the cases of Paul Khlebnikov, Natalia Estemirova, Anna Politkovskaya, and at least 30 others who have been killed since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Just this April, Russian journalist Maxim Borodin died under suspicious circumstances, falling from a fifth-floor window. Borodin is one of several journalists who died this year while investigating the murky activities of the Wagner paramilitary group. The United States urges Russia to investigate these deaths, end impunity, and take steps to prevent future violence against journalists.

Investigative journalists seeking to expose crime and corruption tend to be at greatest risk. Daphne Caruana Galizia, a Maltese journalist known for her investigations into international organized crime and its connections to the Maltese government, was assassinated in October 2017 by a bomb planted in her car. She had been harassed and intimidated for years. Three suspects with links to organized crime are in pretrial detention, but it remains unclear who ordered the assassination. In February, Slovakian investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée were shot dead in his home. Public outrage over his murder forced the resignation of multiple cabinet officials in Slovakia, but so far there have been no indictments. The United States calls on **Malta** and **Slovakia** to do everything possible to bring to justice all those responsible.

In **Ukraine**, the 2016 killing of renowned journalist and Russian citizen of Belarusian origin Pavel Sheremet remains unsolved. We urge the government to redouble its efforts to bring accountability for the murder and for other recent attacks on members of the press.

In **Montenegro** in May, journalist Olivera Lakic was shot in the leg, and in April, a car bomb exploded outside the home of TV Vijesti reporter Sead Sadikovic. We commend official statements committing to a swift and efficient investigation.

On August 10 in **Romania**, at least 15 journalists suffered physical and verbal assaults by police forces, including an instance of use of tear gas, while monitoring protests in Bucharest, according to Active Watch and Reporters Without Borders.

The United States is particularly mindful of the essential role that media freedom plays in ensuring free and fair elections. Reports like the one from **Belarus**, where police officers beat Belsat TV cameraman Andrus Kozel in a polling station during local elections, are of serious concern.

We call on all participating States to implement their commitments on the safety of journalists and on advancing a free, independent, and pluralistic media.

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