



In the capacity as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic opened today, together with the Minister of Culture and Information Ivan Tasovac and OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic, a two-day International Conference "Protecting safety and integrity of journalists in the OSCE region":

"Ms. Mijatovic,
Minister Tasovac,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my particular pleasure to welcome you in Belgrade today at the first thematic event hosted by the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship. The Conference is hosted in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and supported by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. I wish to thank Minister Tasovac and Ms. Mijatovic for their personal engagement in the preparation of the event.

I also take this opportunity to express my satisfaction at the quality of the dialogue that we have established with Ms. Mijatovic and her Office. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate Mr. Mijatovic for being awarded the prestigious Medaille Charlemagne for the merits in the field of media in Europe that will be presented to her in Aachen, at the end of April. This exceptional recognition was granted to the right person.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of the two-day Conference "Protecting safety and integrity of journalists in the OSCE region", is a very topical one. It is one attracting the attention of journalists, media experts and civil society but also of the governments of the OSCE participating States. The fact that Serbia is committed to respect of freedom of the media, of journalists and to the protection of their freedom of expression in general, is evidenced by the theme of the first event organized by our Chairmanship, devoted to the protection of safety and integrity of journalists. We are convinced that freedom of expression, best demonstrated through smooth operation of the media, is a key element of every truly democratic society. It is with regret that I note that violence against journalists is increasing.

During 2014, seven journalists were killed in the OSCE region. In January of this year, eight journalists at Charlie Hebdo magazine offices were killed.

I would like to reiterate that violence against journalists is unacceptable and must be treated as

attack on society as a whole. As Ms. Mijatovic stated in her communique of 6 February 2015: “Safety of journalists is a prerequisite for free expression and freedom of the media”. That is why the participating States should continuously work on the endorsement of relevant laws but also on the creation of not only legal but also all other preconditions for safe and smooth work of journalists. A number of topics will be discussed at the Conference. I would specially like to refer to one of them. Endangering the safety of women journalists has lately become a growing concern. Women journalists are increasingly exposed to threats, particularly via the internet. It impairs their integrity, to a great extent, and, of course, affects their freedom of expression. The participating States should adequately address this phenomena and engage in dealing with threats and violence against journalists through their activities in the area of freedom of expression and the media.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Problems related to safe operation and preservation of the integrity of journalists exist in Serbia, as in many other OSCE participating States. The Conference will give us an opportunity to listen to different views on this topic. The Government of Serbia and its officials seized every opportunity to strongly condemn incidents with violence against journalists. The relevant authorities, such as the Ministry of the Interior, Police and the Prosecutor’s Office, are engaged in disclosing of all the remaining unresolved issues of attacks against journalists. Later on during the Conference you will have the opportunity to hear more about it from the members of the Commission on the Investigation of Murders of Journalists, the operation of which has repeatedly been positively assessed by the OSCE and the European Union.

Serbia has also adopted a set of laws that should further improve freedom of the media and free expression, on which, I believe, Mr. Tasovac will inform you in greater detail.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our intention, as Chair of the OSCE, the Organization that puts safety of journalists high on the agenda, is that this Conference contributes to better understanding of the problems and perils faced by journalists. Our goal is to consider, in an objective and professional manner, legal provisions related to the protection of journalists and examine the need for their possible amendments. We hope that the event will have good-quality discussions on best ways of assuring all aspects of safety of journalists and their work. The tragic Paris developments earlier this year, but also the devastating overall number of killed journalists have made the need for this sort of discussion even more urgent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I wish to assure you that as the country holding the current Chairmanship of the OSCE, Serbia will put the issue of freedom of the media and safety of journalists high on the list of priorities of the Organization. It is our hope that the Belgrade Conference will be yet another step forward towards ensuring safety and freedom to journalists in the entire OSCE region.

I wish you a pleasurable stay in Belgrade.

Thank you.”