



OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic closed today a two-day Conference on “Journalists’ Safety, Media Freedom and Pluralism in Times of Conflict”, organized by the Office of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic.

The following is the full text of the remarks made by Minister Dacic:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to have an opportunity to greet and address you at the closing of the conference organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, following two days of intensively discussing topics of high importance for freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

Sadly, the topic of the Conference, “Journalists’ Safety, Media Freedom and Pluralism in Times of Conflict”, is relevant once again. Although each crisis is different, and conflicts are marked by their own specific features and challenges, what is common to these crises is that journalists and freedom of the media are among their first victims.

For this reason, it is highly important that the experiences gained and lessons learned are discussed on forums like this, aiming to overcome the trend of increase in violence against journalists in the entire OSCE region.

During the Conference we had an opportunity to hear about the alarming data on the increase in number of attacks on journalists. Violence against journalists in its various forms is a harsh violation of freedom of expression and of the media, the very foundations of every democratic society.

It is our deepest belief that freedom of expression is a prerequisite for a free and democratic society. Therefore, it is very important to condemn most vehemently every manifestation of violence against media representatives and freedom of the media.

Please allow me to take this opportunity to remind you that the OSCE participating States, at the first meeting of the Permanent Council this year, were unanimous in condemnation of the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine in Paris, stressing that the freedom of expression is a fundamental, internationally recognized human right.

In times of conflict, the core principles and values of journalism are put to a special kind of test. In emotionally disturbing high-pressure environment, it is of utmost importance to

maintain objectivity in reporting, respond in a timely manner and counter stereotypes and generalizations. Unfortunately, we faced many of these problems ourselves in the 1990s, during the conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

Respect of ethical standards and high principles of their own profession opens a space for journalists to act towards lowering tensions and establishing dialogue and confidence between the sides in conflict.

The OSCE Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia came at a very difficult moment for the entire OSCE region. The situation in and around Ukraine continues to pose a serious threat for the stability and security in the wide area stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The key activities of Serbia's Chairmanship continue towards establishing dialogue and promoting the peace process. In addition, our list of priorities includes finding solutions to so-called "frozen conflicts" within existing frameworks, strongly convinced that even small, yet concrete, steps may promote trust in relations between sides in conflict. Objective and unbiased reporting can also make a contribution in this regard.

As the Chair of the OSCE's 57-member family, the Republic of Serbia has set freedom of expression and freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists, high on its list of priorities. In that regard, we organized the Conference "Protecting Safety and Integrity of Journalists in the OSCE Region" in Belgrade, on 26-27 March this year, in cooperation with the Office of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. In an atmosphere of open discussions, representatives of the OSCE participating States, journalists, media experts and representatives of the civil society considered international standards and examples of good practices in the domain of journalist protection and safety. At the same time, this was the first major event organized by the Republic of Serbia in the capacity as OSCE Chair.

During the conference a question was raised on how to overcome the rising trend of crimes over journalists being left unpunished. We have, as the Serbian Government, made a concrete example in that respect. The Government's Commission on the Investigation of Murders of Journalists, which has so far made notable positive steps, is one of the key mechanisms reflecting our dedication to solve all the cases of attacks, and bring the perpetrators to justice. It is the States and their Governments that should provide the conditions necessary for unhindered work of journalists in an environment free of threats and intimidation, promote pluralism and guarantee the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and of the media.

The issue of journalists' safety, is one of universal importance. In order to produce a fitting response to complex challenges of journalists' safety, it is required to carry out actions that complement each other, as well as joint efforts. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the recent unanimous adoption of the UNSC Resolution 2222 on the protection of journalists, as an inspiring and encouraging development.

I take this opportunity to encourage all the OSCE participating States to follow the specific recommendations to be defined as a result of this Conference, for I believe their implementation will contribute to comprehensive promotion of journalists' safety in the OSCE

region and respect of freedom of expression and of the media in general. I hope that conclusions adopted here, and at the Belgrade Conference mentioned earlier, are to contribute to constructive dialogue aimed at the adoption of Ministerial decisions in this area.

In the end, allow me to express my gratitude to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms. Dunja Mijatovic and her team on organizing this successful conference and reiterate the Chairmanship's expressions of support to the work of her Office."