

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

**Closing remarks by the Director of the Office
of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
Andrey Rikhter**

Dear Minister, State Secretary,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last one and a half days it was encouraging to hear the many important and frank discussions on various aspects of safety of journalists.

On behalf of the Office I would like to extend a great thank you to moderators and speakers, all of you who shared your experiences, your concerns, your suggestions with the delegations, as well as with the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We took note and will use your concerns in our work. No issue is higher on our Office's agenda than that of protecting safety of journalists.

And while we will continue to raise attention to the threats and attacks on journalists, we hope that this issue of Safety and Integrity of journalists in the OSCE region will remain high in the agenda of the CiO and the delegations and authorities of the participating States.

Allow me to shortly summarize the four panels of our conference.

The first panel focused on safety of journalists after Charlie Hebdo.

Some participants noted new emerging threats for the safety of journalists. Just passing new laws on protection of journalists is not enough in order to make shifts for their safety.

Public awareness of the importance of freedom of expression is directly linked with the problem of safety. Moreover harsh defamation and other punitive laws continue to pose a major threat to freedom of expression. As for the fight against terrorism, participants noted that stricter anti-terrorism laws should not be the political answer to Charlie Hebdo events and they are not in line with the spirit of the Paris' demonstration in January 2015.

Some noted that several states use their oppressive agencies to endanger safety of critical journalists for political purposes. Governmental pressure pushes journalists into infotainment, propaganda, and unholy alliance with the political and/or corporate elites. This might avoid immediate threats, but then the profession itself is compromised.

The panel also noted the importance for safety of journalists of such independent branches of power as Parliaments and independent judiciary.

The second panel tackled the topic of safety of female journalists.

Speakers and participants were engaged in an active discussion about the particular challenges of online abuse towards female journalists, and the difficulties to find the right approaches on how to respond to this new online phenomenon.

They discussed the urgent need for the public and the authorities to start recognizing the problem. To implement legal standards, current legislation might be sufficient, so it is more a matter of efficiency of law enforcement.

Female journalists' own narratives are vital in giving these issues the needed attention. The journalists themselves must step forward and tell about their experiences. It's a challenge that many female journalists refuse to tell about their stories and report cases to police because they are afraid this will portray them as weak.

The discussion also focused on the need and ways for trolling not to be tolerated.

The third panel tackled digital security and internet literacy for media and journalists.

The session discussed how the world is becoming more transparent, which means more exposure of citizens, including journalists. It also tackled the related issues of protection of sources, privacy and online anonymity.

Digital security is also about a wide range of issues, all of which, if not dealt with appropriately, can impede on investigative journalism.

Some of these issues which were deliberated during the session include the issue of state surveillance, including data interception and retention.

The participants again discussed intimidation, discrimination, harassment, online bullying, smear campaigns, and discrediting of journalists online.

It was emphasized that the threats to accessibility and availability of online content (i.e. DDoS attacks, notice and takedown procedures) put content and journalists at risk.

The session noted the need to recognize that human rights equally apply online and offline. The same principles should persist in the online world, that are there in the real world.

Finally, the session identified the need to enhance Internet and media literacy; and to recognize the role the positive effects of self-regulation.

Panel 4, focusing on legal protection and integrity of journalists, similarly to the first panel also noted the responsibility of the states to provide legal protection for journalists.

Participants emphasized that democracies need to realize that news is a lifeline to democracy, and media outlets and organizations need effective protection by the state.

They also highlighted the increasing ways for journalists to fall under governmental pressure, including over-restrictive media laws, their

discretionary use allowing for imprisonment for libel and defamation, or attempts by the authorities to intimidate social media users for expressing their views.

In many cases the laws are not being implemented, and their existence in the books is not enough to advance media freedom, integrity and safety.

Participants raised the question of whether journalists need special protection, or is there a need to define who is a journalist. We heard opinions warning about associating the question of integrity with physical protection of journalists.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What is now needed is to take the next steps. For us it means intensified work and attention to the new challenges.

In this regard let me remind that the RFOM will conduct a major conference in Vienna on safety of journalists with the perspective on the current crisis in and around Ukraine. This will take place on 15-16 June and we would welcome delegations to engage in preparations to the event.

I would also like to remind that we look for support to our project on online safety of female journalists and hope to be able to announce next practical steps soon.

Thank you once again to the Serbian Chairmanship for relying on this Office in this very important event and efforts to make it possible in such a short time span.