

Third Roundtable: Safety of journalists in conflict situations

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

The increased number of reports received by the RFoM Office of journalists being targeted is indicative of a growing danger for, and discrimination against, journalists – and a threat to media freedom and freedom of expression in general – as well as the urgent need to counter such a worrisome trend. The Decision on the Safety of Journalists adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan in 2018 (MC Decision 3/18) recognizes that the work of journalists can put them at risk of violence, intimidation and harassment, which can deter them from carrying out their work or lead to self-censorship, thereby having a negative effect on media freedom and media plurality. The Decision further recognizes that targeted campaigns undermining the work of journalists are increasing, eroding public trust and confidence in the credibility of journalism, which in turn can increase the risk of threats and violence. It also recognizes the need to effectively address the concerns of women journalists, and that safety entails physical, legal, psychological, political, technological, economic and other aspects.

The RFoM project on the Safety of Journalists aims at assisting the OSCE participating States to strengthen implementation of relevant OSCE principles and commitments, with particular reference to the pledges outlined in MC Decision 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists. The project also aims to improve the implementation of applicable legal frameworks and existing national strategies for the protection of journalists.

In order to effectively support the implementation of MC Decision 3/18 in the OSCE region, seven thematic roundtables will address the following core issues of journalists' safety:

- 1) data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists and promotion of journalistic work;
- 2) secure working conditions;
- 3) safety of journalists in conflict situations;
- 4) intersectional perspectives;
- 5) digital safety;
- 6) legal harassment;
- 7) police prevention and fight against impunity.

FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

Journalists reporting from conflict zones are working under the most difficult and dangerous conditions and are exposed to serious risks to their lives. Yet their work is essential to provide readers with accurate information on the developments on the ground. Their role is also vital in collecting information on human rights violations and potential war crimes, which can promote justice and accountability.

The third roundtable will focus on the safety of journalists in conflict situations. The purpose of the roundtable is to highlight the specific dangers and challenges for journalists reporting from war, to discuss their protection needs and measures to be taken to allow journalists to carry out their important work during conflict.

Under international humanitarian law, and as recognized by the OSCE participating States in the landmark MC Decision 3/18, journalists and media workers engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians and shall be protected as such. Unfortunately, past and present conflicts in the OSCE region and beyond have shown that journalists reporting from war areas are often deliberately targeted and attacked, despite wearing visible press vests. Since the start of the war against Ukraine in February this year, at least eight journalists and other media workers have been killed, while many more have been wounded, abducted, mistreated or tortured while covering the situation on the ground.

In addition, the conditions for journalists working in exile will also be discussed during this roundtable. Armed conflict, violence, political repression and prosecution of critical voices often force journalists to leave their home countries driving them into exile for their personal safety. Once in exile, journalists face new challenges, which places them in an extremely vulnerable and volatile situation, and are in need of specific assistance and protection in order to be able to carry out their journalistic work without fear. This includes securing their status, such as through emergency relocation and visa schemes, and expedited asylum procedures, but also mid- to longer-term assistance in finding employment and setting up editorial offices, providing journalists with essential equipment and facilities to continue their work as well necessary medical and psychological support. Journalists in exile who continue to report on the political situation and developments in their home country often face direct intimidation, such as physical attacks, harassment and threats, and possible extradition, while they often lack access to effective protection and safety nets in the host country, as well as contacts from home.

The roundtable will address the different layers of challenges that journalists in exile face and develop recommendations on how to ensure journalists' protection in exile and ability to continue their work.



MODALITIES

Date and Time: 1 February 2023, 10:00–12:00 and 14:00–15:00, Bibliotheksaal, Hofburg
Language: English