

Statement by the delegation of Lithuania in the HDIM Working Session I: Fundamental freedoms I

Mr. Moderator,

While fully aligning with the EU statement, I would like to make several remarks in my national capacity.

Let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the speakers for their valuable insights, as well as to commend the extensive efforts and activities of the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović in being at the fire-line in defending the core principles of human rights, despite the continuous harsh public attacks from some participating States.

In our view, it appears a particularly prolific international mechanism for promoting freedom of expression (online and offline) in terms of highlighting individual instances of attacks on journalists and media workers as the biggest threats to media freedom in the OSCE region. All participating States should look to cooperate with the OSCE RFoM as a means of addressing the serious concerns she raises.

Lithuania strongly supports proactive steps that have been taken in international human rights fora to promote a safe environment for journalists and other media actors, enabling them to carry out their tasks independently, without undue interference and without fear of violence and persecution.

Attacks on journalists are, like all attacks on civilians, attacks on humanity. They are also attacks on the international community's ability to understand and respond effectively to conflicts that threaten the international peace and security.

Today, however, wars are fought not only by means of equipment and weaponry, but also through deliberate disinformation, propaganda, and media restrictions. As the warfare is becoming increasingly asymmetrical, and targeted propaganda is becoming just another weapon of war, there is

a clear need for more comprehensive measures to ensure the independence of the media.

Here we would like to join the RFoM who expressed her continuous concern about the increase in violence and harassment against journalists in Russia, including the targeting of journalists seeking to raise the truth surrounding Russian aggression against Ukraine, including Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

Propaganda fuelled by the Russian Government is fomenting and exacerbating tensions. We see how those, who seek to challenge government narratives, become targets of repression. Self-censorship has become the only option for many, while those courageous journalists who preserve their independence are witnessing the space for free public debate shrink.

Using the opportunity, I would like to invite you all to the side-event on the “Extinguishing the Flame of Propaganda with Media Freedom and Pluralism”, which will serve as a platform for exchanging views on how to broaden and deepen the OSCE’s involvement in combatting propaganda, hate speech, and incitement to war while protecting media freedom, and will draw upon the existing efforts of the RFoM in this area.

Lithuania is very concerned with the sharp increase of violence and repressions against journalists, bloggers, media actors and overall against free speech has been observed. World-wide, more than a thousand lives of journalists and media workers have been lost in the last ten years. The scale and gravity of the acts of violence against media representatives which we are witnessing and the scale of impunity for such acts of violence against of journalists has severe consequences for civil societies.

It is for this reason that Lithuania has submitted, during its Chairmanship of the UN Security Council, a draft resolution on the protection of journalists in the conflict zones, which was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on 27 May. The UN Security Council urges member-states to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel working in war zones and fight against impunity; As well to ensure unimpeded conditions for female

journalists and to bear in mind the specifics of their activities. The Security Council calls also on the countries to ingrain the freedom to seek and receive, and disseminate information by all means, including internet.

For the first time, freedom of expression and the role of independent media are linked in the resolution in order to ensure the protection of journalists and civilians in armed conflict. The UN Security Council resolution also condemns the use of media in order to inflict violence or provide a pretext for aggression, thus violating international humanitarian law. This provision of the resolution means that the Security Council condemns the incitement to violence and launching any kind of propaganda war, which is very important in the face of Russian staged information war, which accompanies Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The power of the media is essential for maintenance of international peace and security. It is our duty and responsibility to protect those who risk their lives in order to disclose and disseminate the truth.

From its part, Lithuania will continue to put great emphasis on the safety of journalists and right to freedom of expression, as well as other fundamental freedoms, in the OSCE. Therefore, we join those who are calling openly the OSCE [it means us] to do its homework and not live in a vacuum, and follow the UN and Council of Europe in strengthening comprehensively commitments in the area of freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

We hope that debates initiated/started in this regard in Vilnius Ministerial could be finalized in Belgrade Ministerial through adoption of Ministerial decision on safety of journalists. Therefore, you can count on Lithuania's full support in this process.

I, thank you, Mr. Moderator.