



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## **Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin**

Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Today the Helsinki Commission focuses on the threats to free media in the OSCE region. Media freedom is inextricably linked to the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information, fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. This year celebrate the 35th anniversary of that historic document. This month marks the 20th anniversary of the Copenhagen Document which includes provisions addressing a wide range of human rights, including freedom of expression.

Seemingly on a daily basis we receive reports documenting harassment of independent media and journalists by the authorities in some participating States. From burdensome registration requirements or visits by the tax police to the confiscation of entire print runs or imposition of crippling fines from criminal charges for defamation of individuals, institutions or the state, free media face myriad threats and challenges today.

In an alarming number of instances, journalists are targeted for physical attacks and murder. A year ago this month, I chaired a Commission hearing and heard from the widow of Forbes magazine writer and investigative journalist Paul Klebnikov, gunned down in a contract-style killing outside of his Moscow office nearly seven years ago. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, of the 52 journalists killed in Russia since 1992 more than a third were principally focused on corruption or human rights. Russia was included in CPJ's 2010 Impunity Index of "countries where journalists are slain and killers go free." While Russia is distinct for the scope of anti-press violence, it is by no means alone in the OSCE region. Over the past year journalists have been slain in Turkey, Kazakhstan and Bulgaria. While these investigative journalists paid the ultimate price for their professional endeavors, scores of their colleagues throughout the OSCE region have been targeted for harassment, violent attacks, or imprisonment.

The Commission is circulating a resolution on investigative journalists that we plan to raise at

the upcoming OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Annual Session, devoted this year to the theme: “Rule of Law: Combating Transnational Crime and Corruption.”

The Commission is likewise concerned over moves by some OSCE countries to curtail or control the operations of independent media through the adoption of restrictive laws, including those targeting use of the Internet. For example, in Belarus, a country I visited a year ago, a recently adopted measure on the Internet gives cause for concern given the already tightly controlled media environment there. We are also carefully monitoring recent developments in Ukraine where there have been growing protests by journalists in reaction to stepped up pressures on the media.

Free media play an essential function in any truly democratic society and not surprisingly, authoritarians and other anti-democratic forces often target them for particularly harsh reprisals. Our responsibility is to speak out when journalists come under fire or when governments attempt to clamp down on the right to freedom of expression.

Today’s hearing is part of the Helsinki Commission’s ongoing efforts to draw attention to the plight of investigative journalists and others who place themselves at risk for their work that helps strengthen democracy and human rights. At a Commission briefing late last year, “Violence and Impunity: Life in the Russian Newsroom”, the editor of one of that country’s independent newspapers – a professional who has buried a handful of colleagues killed because of their reporting -- concluded his testimony with an impassioned request that these and similar cases be raised at every opportunity.

That sums up why we are here today and why we will continue to speak out.