

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:  
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“A Deadly Calling: The Murder of Investigative Journalists”**

**Committee Staff Present:**

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and Cooperation in Europe;  
Paul Massaro, Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in  
Europe**

**Participants:**

**Matthew Caruana Galizia, Journalist, son of Daphne Caruana Galizia (via  
videoconference);  
Pavla Holcova, Founder, Czech Center for Investigative Journalism;  
Robert Mahoney, Deputy Executive Director, Committee to Protect  
Journalists;  
Jason Rezaian, Journalist, Washington Post; Global Affairs Analyst, CNN**

**The Briefing Was Held From 3:37 p.m. To 4:53 p.m. in Room SVC 215,  
Capitol Visitor Center, Washington, D.C., Erika B. Schlager, Counsel for  
International Law, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe,  
presiding**

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SCHLAGER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Erika Schlager, and I serve as counsel for international law for the U.S. Helsinki – U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, informally known as the Helsinki Commission. On behalf of the Commission, I'd like to welcome everyone here today.

Before I turn this briefing over to my colleague, Paul Massaro, I'd like to provide some context for today's discussion from the Helsinki Commission perspective. The Helsinki Commission is an independent agency of the federal government charged with monitoring implementation of the 1975 Helsinki Accords and advancing U.S. policies regarding the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Media freedom and media expression are core commitments in the Helsinki process, agreed by the consensus of all 57 participating States. All 57 participating States have also agreed that human rights and democracy are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned.

The targeting of journalists in Afghanistan a week ago, which resulted in the murder of 10 professionals trying to do no more than their jobs, was a shocking illustration of the extraordinary risks so many journalists take. In the OSCE region, scores of journalists are among those who have been swept up in the post-coup attempt in Turkey.

In Russia, investigative journalist Maksim Borodin appears to be the latest victim of sudden Kremlin death syndrome, having died by defenestration, and yesterday we learned that investigative journalist Olivera Lakic was shot in the leg outside her home. She is the second journalist to be attacked in Montenegro this year.

Today's briefing will examine the murders of investigative journalists including Daphne Caruana Galizia of Malta and Jan Kuciak of Slovakia. And I understand that this past Saturday, May 6th, a Holy Mass and memorial concert was attended by approximately 3,000 people in the eastern Slovak village of Gregorovce. Jan Kuciak was murdered with his fiancé, Martina Kusnirova, and they would have been married in Gregorovce this past weekend.

I look forward to hearing from our panelists on the challenge of impunity and the goal of accountability, on the closing space for investigative journalists and any recommendations they would like to bring to the table.

I do have a couple of administrative notes. First, this event is streaming live on the Helsinki Commission's Facebook page as well as our website. Second, if you're tweeting, please use the Helsinki Commission handle, which is @HelsinkiComm, C-O-M-M. Third, please silence your cell phones or any other electronic devices you may have. And, finally, for our panelists, please be sure to speak closely into the microphone, which helps with the clarity of our broadcast. And I would like to say thank you to all of you who have come here today, including my colleagues from the European Union Parliament, the Department of State and the Embassy of the Slovak Republic. I really appreciate that you're here to hear these tremendous panelists.

With that, I turn the briefing over to policy advisor Paul Massaro, and thank you, Paul, for organizing this event.

MASSARO: Well, thank you so very much, Erika, for that fantastic introduction. We're very grateful to have four distinguished panelists with us here today. We'll first hear from Matthew Caruana Galizia, who is joining us over SKYPE. Matthew is the son of Daphne Caruana Galizia and himself a journalist. He formally worked with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and was an instrumental player in major investigations such as the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers. He left ICIJ in 2018 to work on the case surrounding the assassination of his mother.

Following Matthew, we will hear from Pavla Holcova, who is the founder of the Czech Center for Investigative Journalism, which is a member center of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project – OCCRP. An accomplished journalist in her own right, Pavla collaborated with Jan Kuciak on an investigation in the Italian Mafia's influence in Slovakia.

We will then here from Robert Mahoney, deputy executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists – CPJ. CPJ is one of the leading organizations advocating for global freedom of the press and the rights of journalists. Rob is very well positioned to represent them as a lifelong journalist himself. He has written on the murders of Caruana Galizia and Kuciak.

Finally, we will here from Jason Rezaian. Jason is a journalist for the Washington Post and a global affairs analyst for CNN who served as the Post's correspondent in Tehran from 2012 to 2016. During that time, he spent 544 days unjustly imprisoned by Iranian authorities until his release in January 2016. He knows all too well the threats faced by journalists and has written extensively on the topic, including the cases of Caruana Galizia and Kuciak.

With that, I would like to hand the floor to our first speaker, Matthew Caruana Galizia. Matthew, please.

CARUANA GALIZIA: Thank you, Paul, and thank you to the – to the Helsinki Commission. It's a real honor to join this panel. And you – I assume that people in the audience are more or less familiar with the case of my mother. What they're probably less familiar with is what led to everything that happened leading up to her assassination. Things really turned badly around 2016 with the publishing of the Panama Papers. But even before that, my mother had – she was right – really at the peak of her 30-year career as a journalist, and the threats against her started long ago. Growing up, I thought these things were normal. I thought it was normal to get strange phone calls from people screaming threats on the phone or to receive letters at home containing feces or handcuffs in the – in the letter box.

We came home from school (audio break, technical difficulties) back in the '90s when my mother was writing about drug trafficking and nothing was really ever done to ensure that there was no impunity for these crimes – to ensure that people were brought to justice for them. So there was this kind of slow increase in threats, I suppose, over the first 25 years of her career. But, as I said, over the past perhaps two or three years, things became really, really bad.

There was a concerted effort by government figures to bring libel cases against my mother. She had 46 pending against her at the time of her death – five criminal libel cases and the rest of – 19 of them brought against her by a single political party donor with connections to organized crime.

I think it became so bad around 2016 because that was when my mother was bringing really incontrovertible evidence of corruption at the highest levels of government to light. It just became – it became impossible for people to deny that this corruption really existed – that things had become unbearably bad.

So something had to give. Either my mother had to be eliminated or there had to be some kind of judicial action taken against the corrupt politicians and businessmen on whom she was reporting. And in the end, because Malta's institutions were ineffective, incapable of taking action, completely captured by corporate interests and the interests of the governing party, no action was taken and we know – we know what gave in the end.

My mother was killed, and that seems to be what's happening across Europe today. In countries where institutions are weak, where there's no – and where journalists are exposed and left fighting corruption alone, they're really the last institution standing against government corruption. Then they're threatened and they're eliminated.

This happened in Slovakia. It looks like it's happening on the kind of periphery states of Europe – obviously, Malta is one of them – as well as accession states like Montenegro and Serbia, that things are becoming increasingly difficult for journalists. In these countries, the threats that journalists live under have become normalized.

So take Italy as an example. It's more or less the same situation, where so many journalists are living under armed guards that I've lost count. With Malta, it's more or less a lost cause in the sense that we depend almost entirely on outside help – on the help of the European Commission, on the help of the State Department, and/ or the help of journalists from countries where they're able to practice their profession more freely.

This is why I think the Daphne Project has been such a help and such a boost to both journalists and investigators in Malta who are trying to do their job under very difficult circumstances, fighting the corrupt leaders of their institutions. It really gives backing to these people and it really – it really brings – it really puts pressure on the Maltese government to take action, to allow institutions to do their work, to allow institutions to prosecute corruption and to bring charges against people who are engaged in organized crime. (Audio break, technical difficulties) – or, rather, this attention on the country has really changed everything, both for my family as well as for the journalists there who are still alive. And what I hope is that it also changes the game for journalists not just in the periphery states of Europe who are also trying to do their job under difficult circumstances, but journalists all over the world, too. I hope it inspires them and makes them feel as though the world is looking.

So thank you, everyone, for this meeting and for being here today. The attention that you're giving to this issue is really part of what, in the end, I think (audio break, technical difficulties) this and not just for my mother, but for other journalists who have been killed and imprisoned and who are under threat all over the world.

MASSARO: Thank you very much, Matthew, for those comments, and thank you so much for your emphasis on the need for attention on these subjects. I hope that this event serves that cause and, you know, for my part, I've personally been deeply inspired by the work of the Daphne Project and the way that the leading papers of Slovakia came together in the aftermath of Jan Kuciak's death and published his unfinished work.

I think that, you know, the collaboration among investigative journalists now has been one welcome development from a very dire set of circumstances. So with that thought, I'd like to hand the floor over to Pavla. Pavla, please.

HOLCOVA: Hello. Yeah. So thank you, Helsinki Commission, for having this important – fully important discussion and for inviting me being part of it. I used to live in a region where the media press – media were among the most free in the world. But it doesn't apply anymore. It's not true anymore because it seems society doesn't see the democratic values as a priority anymore. It feels as people prefer simple solutions, simple media, simple articles on those that are more complicated, more analyzing, more difficult to understand.

We are, in Central Europe as a whole region, facing state capture at a level we could never imagine before. For journalists, the winter already came. We have a fear. We are facing the fear and the fear is paralyzing. It's paralyzing us for – from doing in-depth analysis of the situation we are now living. It's really difficult for us to tell where is the line between politicians, powerful political parties, and organized crime – where is the line between financial fraudsters and business interests and, once again, political parties. This is mostly the case in Czech Republic but in Slovakia as well. This is just the wider context of what actually happened of the brutal violent attacks on my colleague, Jan Kuciak, and on Daphne in Malta.

Also, it highlights the importance of our job, importance of doing proper investigative journalism. There is one real important thing I've learned from this murder of my friend and colleague and that's the importance of sharing and collaboration. That's also the reason why I founded Czech Center for Investigative Journalism in 2013 and why we, as the Czech Center, joined Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project because OCCRP, what is the abbreviation, they are, for me, kind of a – trend setters in the form of the way of doing journalism because it's pretty much based on collaboration and pretty much based on sharing of the information.

It's not only to bring groundbreaking global stories on organized crime, on money laundering, on state capture, but also it brings protection to journalists because it's quite easy to silence one journalist or two. It's much more difficult to silence a network of journalists. And as I'm going to repeat again and again, you can kill a journalist but you can't and you shouldn't kill a story.

Once you do it, once you kill a journalist, there are tens more to come to finish those stories, as we can see in Daphne Project and in the “All for Jan” project. Yeah, but the murders are just tip of the iceberg. These days in Slovakia, even though the government changed, I still believe the situation is still not stable because the people who are now taking part being exchange in the government are from the same governmental party. Still people protest. Still there are thousands of people in the streets requesting the real change in Slovak society, requesting the real change in the politics, not another members of the very same political party. Also, I believe there’s not much will to properly investigate the murder of my colleague, Jan Kuciak.

In Czech Republic, the situation is slightly different but not better. We have a president who actually poses in front of the press with a toy gun with inscription, “To journalists.” Also, when he entered the room with Vladimir Putin, who is known for taking the press as a(n) enemy, he joked with him – what is actually recorded – that there are too many journalists and we should eliminate them.

At the same time, our prime minister, Andrej Babis, he’s owner of the biggest media house. At the same time, he is the leader of the most powerful political party and at the same time he’s one of the most rich businessmen and one of the most rich person in the Czech Republic. He is actually a walking, living conflict of interest.

The situation is not better in Hungary, what is another country for the Central Europe. The prime minister, Viktor Orban, created some kind of a blacklist of journalists who are enemies of, let’s say, his state. What’s going to happen now with the blacklist it’s not clear.

In Poland, those media who are not reporting well for the government are being eliminated by financial means. They are being investigated for how they pay taxes. There are audits and there – and many, many more. They don’t get enough advertisement to survive because they don’t get the advertisement from the state companies. Yeah, and we can probably continue to other countries as well.

Anyway, just slightly a little bit more on the personal note, because of my job as a(n) investigative reporter, my family was forced to live – is forced to live under police protection. Still, we, as a journalist, not only in Czech Republic but also in the whole region of Central Europe, we are called enemies. We are called foreign agents. We are called mercenaries. It’s really difficult to persuade the society that they actually need us.

Yeah. Maybe journalism must undergo such a kind of a crisis that we actually experience today so that the people, that a society, would understand better how they actually need our work, how they should actually value the information, unbiased, in-depth, well-researched information that, in some cases, can cost lives of the reporters.

Today, I have brought my daughter here – she’s sitting there – just to show her that there are still people and the groups of people who do value the job we are doing. Thank you.

MASSARO: Well, thank you very much, Pavla, and we most certainly do value the job that you are doing and, you know, I really appreciate you highlighting this, what seems to be a vanishing line between organized crime and mainstream politics, and I think that it's really alarming. It's something that I pay attention to at the Commission quite a lot. I work on a lot of anti-corruption issues and that's my connection here. It's what Erika and I are – have worked on this together.

But there really is not an obvious solution. I think part of the solution is to be this collaboration that you highlight between investigative journalists. It's an extremely powerful deterrent to know that, you know, you can kill the journalist but you cannot kill the story and it's just not going to do anything for you except bring even greater attention on it.

HOLCOVA: Yeah. I meant, there's also other tool because sometimes in the countries where we work we are not able to publish the stories because once – we will start to be prosecuted for the story. The legal system is so embedded with the government that actually it's clear – in, like, you can say, like, 100 percent that you can't win the court case as a journalist. So it's important to publish somewhere else where actually the government, they don't have the tools how to manipulate the legal process.

MASSARO: Absolutely, and that – and that issue of state capture – I've written down right here – that's something I wanted to talk about. So thank you, again, for highlighting that. It is a confounding issue.

So with that, I'd like to hand the floor to Rob. Please.

MAHONEY: Thank you, and thank you to the Commission for organizing this. And I'm glad – I'm sorry – and I'm glad that you mentioned that there were people from the European Union here because I think that this is a message that we need their support in getting out.

I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the context of global threats to journalists and to press freedom and try to situate what's happening in Europe into that because, to us, this is quite unprecedented and quite alarming. You know, being a reporter in much of the world is dangerous work but being an investigative reporter can be deadly, and the assassinations of Daphne in Malta in October and of Jan in February underscore the dangers facing reporters who dig painstakingly through thousands of documents and track down reluctant sources to expose wrongdoing and to hold the powerful to account.

Of the 1,303 journalists killed since the Committee to Protect Journalists began keeping statistics in 1992, more than half – that's 838 – were murdered. Covering politics, crime and corruption is more dangerous as an assignment for most reporters than covering wars. Some 256 journalists have been murdered over that period and they were covering corruption while another 189 were covering crime, according to our research.

These murders were particularly – sorry, according to our research – the killers and those ordering the murder of journalists are rarely brought to justice. In fact, in 86 percent of murder cases, the killers and those who hire them get away scot free. We, at the Committee to Protect

Journalists, along with our colleagues around the world, are working hard to ensure that this is not the case for Daphne and Jan. We want their killers and the masterminds who employed them unmasked, prosecuted and brought to justice. These murders were particularly shocking because they took place in the European Union, where we expect the rule of law to prevail.

Over the years, fortunately, relatively few reporters have paid the ultimate price for their work in Western Europe. That makes these two brutal slayings of investigative reporters, which were only four months apart, unprecedented. The intimidation of reporters following the tentacles of organized crime is a great concern. Unchecked, assaults and threats will lead to that cancer that eats away at independent journalism in many violence-plagued societies – self-censorship.

Smuggling, money laundering, human trafficking, embezzlement of EU funds and subsidies are all topics that European journalists, whether individually or in collectives, have taken on, and this leaves them exposed. Failure to achieve full justice in the cases of Daphne and Jan could leave journalists in Malta and Slovakia in even greater danger. It would also send a message throughout the rest of the continent that reporters' lives don't matter. That would be catastrophic for press freedom across Europe, especially given the growing authoritarianism we are witnessing in Russia and in several of its former Soviet-era allies.

As mentioned, Poland and Hungary are deeply troubling examples of a decline of press freedom in the European Union. Brussels looks on fecklessly as media diversity and freedom of expression fray on its eastern edges. In Poland, the government has taken control of public media, cut off official access to critical reporters and threatened others with legal action. Lucrative state advertising is used to wield influence over news outlets. Critical outlets are deprived of that ad revenue.

And Hungary has gone even further down that road. Prime Minister Viktor Orban, now starting his third term in office, has most broadcast and print media in his camp. For example, the news website Atlatzso estimates that more than 500 titles are now in the hands of oligarchs and businessmen linked to the government, all of them heavily benefiting from state advertising. Of those 500, just three years ago there were only 31 that were aligned to the government. That shows how much damage has been done in Hungary to media – through media ownership to the independent press.

And in Bulgaria, another EU member state, three investigative journalists have been attacked in the past six years. One, a prominent television reporter, Genka Shikerova, has had her car set on fire twice since 2013. She's famous for asking politicians tough questions on air. Someone, apparently, did not appreciate her frankness. No one, of course, has been prosecuted for any of the assaults or the arson.

And so it's hardly surprising that in the countries lining up to join the European Union press freedom violations also go unpunished. Look at Montenegro. Just last night, as mentioned, journalist Olivera Lakic was shot and wounded outside her home in the capital of Podgorica. She covers crime and corruption for the newspaper Vijesti. It's the second time she's been assaulted for her work, and this latest shooting is worrying because it comes just five

weeks after a car bomb exploded outside the home of investigative reporter Sead Sadikovic in the northern town of Bijelo Polje. No one was injured. Sadikovic, who also reports on corruption and organized crime, had been threatened in February over a report he aired in December. He reported the threat to the police, but they took no action.

Outside of the EU, Ukraine has seen the murder of two journalists in the past four years including Pavel Sheremet, who, like Daphne, was blown up in his car. And, finally, to Russia, which is the murder capital of Europe for the press, some 38 journalists have been killed there since 1992. Some have been high-profile assassinations such as those of Forbes editor Paul Klebnikov, or Novaya Gazeta, Anna Politkovskaya.

Some deaths barely make a ripple in the international media because it's hard to prove the link to journalism. One such is the death last month of investigative reporter Maksim Borodin, who mysteriously fell from the balcony of his fifth-floor apartment in Yekaterinburg. Borodin had gained national attention in Russia for his reporting on the deaths in Syria of Russian private military contractors fighting on the side of President Bashar al-Assad.

This is a dark time for European journalism and the killings of Daphne and Jan are an outrage. But that's not the end of the story. It can't be. Journalists are fighting back with the best weapon they have – journalism. Last month, an international collective of journalists representing 18 media outlets from 15 countries was launched – the Daphne Project. Its mission is to continue working on Daphne Caruana Galizia's unfinished stories as well as to investigate the truth about her murder.

The project yielded almost immediate tangible results because on November the 23rd, a member of the European Parliament, Pieter Omtzigt, was appointed special rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He will monitor the ongoing murder investigation in Malta, examine the broader circumstances surrounding the journalist staff, and make calls for impunity to be addressed.

In Slovakia, as we've heard, protests have brought the resignations of the prime minister and the interior minister, and journalists around the world, as well as those who were working on the news – on the news website Aktuality with Jan, have vowed to pursue the stories that Jan was working on at the time of his death and to monitor the investigation into his killing.

It's essential that we, as journalists, continue the investigations of our murdered colleagues to send the message that you cannot censor reporters and shut down their work through media. This we are doing. We will not remain silent. Briefings like this one play an important part in keeping the plight of the press in the public eye. It is essential that we keep up the publicity and the pressure so that law enforcement and the judiciary bring justice to all those involved in the assassinations. Failure to do so will send the message to those with the means and the motive that murder is an effective way of silencing criticism. Thank you.

MASSARO: Thank you very much, Rob, and I wish the overview weren't so grim, but here we are. Thank you also for highlighting the cancer of self-censorship. In fact, the worst thing that could possibly happen now is for people to be silent – is for people to stop doing their

work. That's exactly the purpose of these murders, right, is to – is to cause that reaction. So if they learn that the only reaction they'll get is louder voices, then perhaps these murders will cease. Then that would be the hope, right?

MAHONEY: Absolutely, and, you know, there are these consortiums of journalists, some of whom are represented here, that are doing great work in keeping these alive. And so, you know, congratulations to them and I wish them well in their pursuit.

MASSARO: Thanks again, Rob.

Jason, you have the floor.

REZAIAN: Thanks for having me this afternoon. I want to make a confession that I'm sort of an accidental advocate of press freedom. You know, I've spent many years working in Iran, which is a pretty hostile environment to journalists, and as many of us who work in that part of the world or working in countries where we face a lot of threat, we don't think a lot about the challenges our colleagues face in other places.

But I had the opportunity for a year and a half to think about that a great deal and I had the unenviable experience of being somebody who had a great platform with the Washington Post to have that taken away from me, to be silenced for a year and a half and not really have the ability to defend myself in the face of simply ridiculous claims. So there wasn't any moment when I sat there in prison and thought to myself, OK, I'm going to come out and be a defender of press freedoms.

But when I came out I saw just how much work had been done on my behalf and realized that this is something that I needed to become more involved with, A, because it was the right thing to do, but B, because I had a(n) opportunity and a platform, and it seemed like a unique one and a responsibility, really, whether I wanted it or not, and I decided I wanted it.

And after about two years of recovery – it's been since January since I returned to work at the Post – and I decided that I would write about these issues as much as the Post gave me the opportunity to do that, and they've given me a lot of room to write about press freedom issues, attacks on the free press, and the unfortunate reality is it's not confined to places like Iran and Russia and Mexico and, you know, what I'm seeing in my work, and I know that folks at CPJ, RSF, the Press Club, other organizations know very well and have known for a long time that this is a problem that reaches all over the world.

And one of the first stories that I wrote when I came back was about Jan, and it was something that affected me very deeply and this through line, this sort of connecting thread of impunity, is one that I understand in a unique way and feel as though I have an opportunity to strike back at.

But I can't do it alone and none of these organizations can do it without the help of one another, and I'm happy to see the collaborative nature of the work that you all do. As you guys

know better than most, these are not stories that attract the same kind of attention that, you know, presidential scandals or volcanoes or, you know, other sorts of one-off news events do.

But it affects us all very deeply and, you know, I had the opportunity – about a month ago, I met Matthew up in New York and we shared a few minutes together and, you know, the thing that came home to me was just how much these crimes against journalists destroy lives, disrupt families, scatter people all over the world, and it's not something that I'm going to sit quietly about.

But, again, you know, the key is to figure out ways to raise awareness on these – on these cases. The way – fortunately, for me, awareness was raised on mine, because without that, you know, I wouldn't be here today. I mean, we look at the case of, you know, President Trump pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal yesterday. There's five American prisoners that are being held there right now and you didn't hear much about them except from me and a handful of other journalists who knew that you had to write about this lest they be forgotten.

And so, you know, and these are – these are issues that don't have a lot of parallels but, you know, we have to use the tools and platforms available to us and work together to find some common answers to the problems that up until recently we may have thought were unique to, you know, different geographic locations. But as it turns out, you know, this is – there's a problem everywhere and we got to figure out the answer collectively. So I'm happy to be a part of trying to find a solution for that.

MASSARO: Well, thanks so much, Jason. Thank you so much for being here today. I think, you know, I and many, many people, if not all in this room, see you as the living breathing example of how journalists should and, hopefully, will react in the face of the kind of intimidation and attacks that many are facing today – that is, get louder, get deeper in it and really start to speak out. So thank you so much for the work you're doing.

We'll now enter a Q&A phase and we hope the audience will participate. I will start off with just one remark and, you know, I welcome anyone that would like to say something on this, and that is I'd like to ask a question about the nature of these two killings in particular and the nature of the killings we're seeing in the region.

No effort was made here to make these look like accidental killings. These were very clearly planned, in both cases, by hired guns – hit men. So I'd just like to get your – get your thoughts on – and if we could start with Matthew and Pavla and anyone else who would like to speak – on why this is the case and perhaps why this is the case here versus the type of murder we see in Russia of journalists where somebody falls out a window, right, is gone.

Matthew, would you like to say something, or?

CARUANA GALIZIA: Thank you. Just needed to unmute. That's the first thing that I thought of. I mean, on the scene that day when I ran out to the car and everything was on fire, the first thing I thought was that this is a declaration of war. It isn't – it isn't just – it isn't just a

way of getting rid of someone. It's a show of force and a show of impunity. We can do this in broad daylight and we can get away with it.

And I think it's also – I think the fact that my mother was a woman also played a part. If you look at this in the kind of culture and dynamics of organized crime in southern Europe and it's dominated by men, and it would have been extremely damaging to the egos of both the corrupt politicians that my mother was reporting on, who are almost universally men, and their allies in organized crime or their facilitators.

And for them to be openly – to be exposed and mocked by a journalist who's a woman would have been so humiliating, something that they would have never been able to recover from, and I just can't escape this feeling that that somehow played a part in my mother's murder. To someone or to gangster politicians like the prime minister's chief of staff, for example, to have my mother, a woman, reporting on his activities and revealing what he was doing it would have been just so humiliating he'd need to retaliate in a way like this, and I think that might explain the choice of method.

But, of course, like you said, it's force. It's a show of impunity – that they simply were not concerned and not concerned with making it look like a suicide or anything like that. They were just so confident of their ability to get away with it. And it seems that they're right, really, because we're six months down the line and we still have no idea who's behind this.

MASSARO: Thank you, Matthew.

Pavla, do you have something you want to say to that?

HOLCOVA: In case of Slovakia, it's not only a question of the murder of Jan but his fiancé, Martina Kusnirova, was murdered as well. It brings even – I don't know, I have no explanation. I have no theory why. It was to show off the power or the possibility that yes, we can kill a journalist. I have no explanation for it because it had to be clear that it would bring much bigger storm than if it would look innocent. And still, I really – it is one of the questions I would really like to hear any kind of explanation why they did it this way. It was probably to send some message. But what kind of a message? It's not clear to me.

MASSARO: Thank you. I'm going to ask a second question. Then we'll open it up. Erika, would you like to ask a question? No? OK.

And that question is, you mentioned during – both Matthew and Pavla – that there's a lot of journalists under police protection – Pavla, yourself. You're forced to live under police protection. I was wondering who provides this police protection and are these elements of the state that are not captured. You know, are these police acting as protection or are they acting as keeping tabs on you, making sure that, you know – you know.

HOLCOVA: Yeah. Actually, I am, and my family, we are under police protection of different state –

MASSARO: Oh.

HOLCOVA: – that actually where it happened. So I am pretty much confident that the guys who are taking care of us are real professionals and they do their best job to really keep us safe. I wouldn't be so sure about my situation if I would be under police protection provided by Slovak state.

MASSARO: OK. Thank you very much. Do we have questions from the audience? Jordan, please. Jordan Warlick, office director at the Helsinki Commission. And, Jordan, thank you so much for your help in putting this event together.

Q: Yeah. Absolutely, and thank you so much to all of you for being here and for sharing your powerful stories with us.

Rob, you referred to Russia as the murder capital of journalists in Europe. Would you say that these increasing threats in the EU – the murders within the EU – does that embolden Russia in any way, give them more of a free pass to, you know, commit more murders against their own people?

MAHONEY: I don't think they need any encouragement to be bold in suppressing the media. I think that it's unfortunate that it's probably spread westward from Russia rather than going back the other way. We've had – there was a spate of murders of journalists in the mid-2000s. There were a few years when there were none and now it's started again.

Basically, much of the free and independent media in Russia has been silenced. There are very, very few, and you could look at it that apart from those few brave journalists that do do this, either there's been state capture of the media, particularly of broadcast media, or the message that was sent by these high-profile assassinations has been received and journalists are either censoring themselves or pulling back. So Russia does not need any encouragement from bad actors in the European Union. It's sad to think that it's actually spread now.

MASSARO: Thanks very much. Do we have any questions from the audience? Please, right over there. If you could state your name and your affiliation that would be great.

Q: Viola Gienger. I'm a freelance journalist.

Thank you all very much for taking the time to tell your stories here. I think it is really important. For those of you with experience in Europe recently, when these cases have come about of attacks on journalists there, what is the most effective, if any, response that you have seen from the European Union or government officials that should occur more often?

MASSARO: Is there anyone in particular you'd like to direct the question to?

Q: No.

MASSARO: OK. Anyone like to take that? Pavla? Matthew? Rob? Jason?

MAHONEY: Well, I thought maybe the European-based journalists would want to go first.

MASSARO: Yeah.

MAHONEY: For us – the Committee to Protect Journalists – the most effective response is to keep the case in the public eye and to keep the pressure on various institutions. Don't forget that the administration of justice in the European Union is a national thing. So you've got to – you've got to work with the national governments of EU member states first. But we bring these cases to the European Parliament, to the European Council.

All these organizations, they don't really have much – have much power. That's why it's important that we have briefings like this to keep the pressure on the Maltese and the Slovak authorities. Otherwise, they'll just slink away into the darkness and these cases will not get proper justice because impunity is the big problem here and it's the same in Europe as it is in anywhere else.

So I would encourage you, if you are a journalist, to write about these cases and to follow it through. Like Jason was saying, he's started following it. That's the only way that you'll get – you'll get some justice. It's to make there be a political cost to killing journalists or suppressing freedom. If there is no political cost, there will be no justice.

HOLCOVA: Yeah, I agree. Thank you for it. For us as a journalist, there – the most important answer to such a killing is to finish those stories, not to let them be unfinished, and even if you are not able to finish those stories, you should publish them even if they are not 100 percent ready. We should publish them just to show what was going on behind, not to silence the voice that was actually digging into those stories, exposing those people who didn't want to be exposed, and expose those people.

MASSARO: So I'd like to follow up on that question real quick – and, Matthew, just feel free to jump in whenever here in the Q&A session, OK – and that is to ask are there any thoughts on the panel of – you know, you're very right to state, Rob, that the administration of justice remains at the national level in the European Union and that's a really major piece of this. Are there actions that concerned Eurocrats in Brussels can take?

MAHONEY: Absolutely there's a lot they can take – a lot of things they can do. We have seen the appointment of a special rapporteur for the Council of Europe. That's not the same, obviously, as the European Union but it is an important institution. It's older than the European Union, and we need to make sure that all those structures that do exist, including the European Parliament and the Commission, are aware of this and are able to prevail upon individual member states. There is moral and other pressure that can be brought on the administration of justice in these states and we certainly want to make sure that those institutions are active for those countries that are lining up to join the European Union like Montenegro, which we've mentioned, which has –

MASSARO: Accession criteria.

MAHONEY: Yeah. So we've seen what happened with Turkey with – you know, when the pressure was taken off. The place has gone backwards very fast, from a press freedom point of view, from the days when it too was actively seeking to join the European Union. So, no, Brussels has a very important part to play and, again, you know, that's – we have an office there for that very reason – that we are trying to make sure that pressure is brought and influence wielded on those institutions.

MASSARO: And while we are sort of at the – at the – in this policy responses discussion, we've focused a lot on, and rightfully so, on the way that investigative journalists have responded to this with more collaboration in a deterring capacity – you know, continuing to push this line of you can kill the journalist but you can't kill the story and that the murder of a journalist will only bring more attention to the story you were trying to kill. Is there a role for Congress outside of holding events like these?

HOLCOVA: Actually, I think yes.

CARUANA GALIZIA: Can I say something? But go ahead.

HOLCOVA: OK. I will be quick. Yeah. Actually, what U.S. policymakers can do is to ask their European counterparts to keep or to bring the issue of protection not only of the journalists but also of the whistleblowers and to discuss it more and actually to implement it better in international laws because in Europe the protection of whistleblowers it's not as embedded in society and in the system as in the U.S. At least, I hope so that it still is embedded in U.S. society – protection of the whistleblowers.

MASSARO: It is.

CARUANA GALIZIA: I think the statistics that Rob was mentioning give an indication of what the root cause is and what the policy solutions could be because if you have a high number of journalists who are being killed because they're reporting on corruption then the obvious solution, well, is to work on eliminating corruption and the European Union has been very weak on that, especially when you compare it to the U.S.

It has no effective cross-border judicial cooperation and no effective cross-border police cooperation, no effective diplomatic pressure on member states when it comes to corruption. Look at what Malta has gotten away with for so many years and they're still getting away with. It really took the murder of a journalist for the EU's justice commissioner to finally arrange a visit to Malta. It really shouldn't get that far. You shouldn't need that.

I really believe that that's the way forward. You can throw as much funding as you want at investigative journalism, but really what we need is to not be standing alone. We need an immediate response. When we bring stories to attention, there needs to be some kind of – (audio break, technical difficulties).

MASSARO: Thank you very much, Matthew, and, you know, I couldn't agree with you more. Right. Yeah. I just wanted to say real quick that, you know, yes, if you want to – if you want to stop investigative journalists from being murdered then fight corruption and end corruption. (Laughter.) I mean, I'm with you.

CARUANA GALIZIA: We didn't want to be – we don't want armed guards. We don't want to put security cameras on our houses. This isn't a way to live.

MASSARO: Right.

CARUANA GALIZIA: We just need the root cause to be – the root cause of the problem to be solved.

MASSARO: Thank you very much, Matthew.

Bob Hand, policy advisor with the Helsinki Commission.

Q: Yes, thank you. It's on? OK. Just need to speak into it. I want to thank all the panelists for your presentations. At the Commission, I follow the countries of the Balkans and so, of course, what just happened in Montenegro but also what happens in Serbia and so many of the other countries with investigative journalism, and its link to revealing corruption is a deep concern to me.

The one thing I take a little bit of heart in in what happened in Montenegro with the shooting of Ms. Lakic is that people go out into the street and say the denial of her right to report is a denial of our right to know, and maybe it's because Montenegro wasn't as developed a democracy that they feel that linkage and that threat much more closely.

But it begs the question, and I haven't heard it at least so much here in the case of Malta or Slovakia, putting aside what the European Union does or its officials or what the United States says, how do the – what was the public reaction to the fact that in what's supposed to be a democratic country something like this can take place and is there a sufficient strength in the democratic institutions and the system that there are people within Parliament who are insisting on a thorough investigation and prosecution?

Is there a public out there saying this should not be happening in our country and trying to encourage efforts to change things or is it, as you, Pavla, had said, is the public, the way I interpreted it, more passive – they just want simple information and they just view this as a way – as just a further confirmation that maybe that's the way to go and there's just less of a commitment to preserving a democracy?

So the short question is what was the public reaction in Malta as well as in Slovakia to these incidents in terms of expressing outrage or seeking some concrete action to try to keep it from happening again?

MASSARO: Pavla, since your name was mentioned I guess you get to speak first and then, Matthew, I imagine you'll want to say something to this. Then we can –

HOLCOVA: Yeah. Actually, the public response in Slovakia was huge. It's something like 5 million citizens country and there were something like a hundred thousand protestors in streets, what is not typical for a region. Those were the biggest protests since – in the modern history of Slovakia. It was huge and it was the only reason why any changes were made in the government.

Actually, the impact of the protests looked good. You know, the prime minister was forced to resign, the minister of interior was forced to resign, the head of anti-corruption unit resigned, and the police president is due to resign by the end of May.

Still, the public doesn't see it as real change to the government because those people were replaced by the people from the very same political party but didn't really bring the change in the – in the trust in the institutions, in the free courts, in independent judiciary, in the police. The trust in the police is probably the lowest in last 20 years. So there are more demands and the recent demand of the people who are in the streets is actually the new elections that would come or won't come. But the public outcry was huge.

MASSARO: Matthew.

CARUANA GALIZIA: It is good that you mentioned Montenegro – (audio break, technical difficulties) – the European Union's complete inability to deal with corruption even in pre-accession states, and over the past couple of years the European Union has thrown I think it's almost half a billion euros in pre-accession funding at Montenegro and over the past decade Montenegro's ranking as a democracy by the economists and intelligence unit has actually fallen from flawed democracy to hybrid regime, which is one step above an authoritarian regime and, I mean, this just – it, obviously, corresponds to the state of journalism in the country itself.

And regarding the – I mean, civil society reaction is – (audio break, technical difficulties) – Malta. Malta has had a very different experience to Balkan or Eastern European states. There's no – there's very little culture of public protest or civil disobedience or anything like that. We're really only just the beginning. I think this is the first time in probably about 20, 30 years that we're seeing anything resembling civil society pro-democracy movements. They're really just the beginning.

MASSARO: Thank you very much, Matthew.

Jason.

REZAIAN: Yeah. I just wanted to say that, I mean, from a sort of a media news point of view, I mean, the Post sent our Berlin bureau chief to Bratislava to cover the protests and he did several live reports from there, which, you know, I was really happy about it. We wrote quite a few stories about the murder and we'll continue to write about them. But, you know, I don't know what impact that that had there.

MASSARO: Jason, in in your statement you mentioned that public outcry and public advocacy was really key in getting you out of the unjust imprisonment that you found yourself in in Iran. Could you speak at all to sort of how that went and how effective advocacy looks?

REZAIAN: Well, look, I mean, I was on the other side of the wall –

MASSARO: Right. Right.

REZAIAN: – so I, you know, the – speak to the folks here –

MASSARO: Kind of like forensics. (Laughter.)

REZAIAN: Yeah. I mean, Rob and our friends from RSF who are here were intimately involved in that throughout. But it has to be a concerted effort, you know, that takes place between advocacy groups, the organizations, families, receptive governments, and if you don't have all of those pieces working in concert, you're fighting an uphill battle that you're not likely to win. I think – does that jive with your experience, Rob?

MAHONEY: Yeah, absolutely. You need a coalition of people pushing in different directions and all the time. There's no one-size-fits-all way of getting people like Jason out of prison. Iran is its own case. It's very different. But the one thing that comes through, as we've seen with the journalism, with the advocacy, is the need for cooperation and concerted effort.

MASSARO: Great. Thank you very much.

REZAIAN: And kind of a singularity of the message, whether it's, you know, this is an outrage that you've –

MASSARO: Yeah.

REZAIAN: – imprisoned, murdered or otherwise silenced a journalist and, you know, it's – I think one thing that undercuts a lot of these cases, especially in, you know, authoritarian countries when there's imprisonments involved – I mean, these days there's so often these charges of against national security and terrorism and espionage –

MASSARO: Oh, yeah.

REZAIAN: – and, you know, these are patently false, across the board. You know, you haven't found one yet that was accurate and I think we need to do a better job of calling that out from the get-go, you know.

MASSARO: Absolutely.

Yes, please. If you could say your name and affiliation.

Q: This is Alex Tarascio with the International Republican Institute.

And I found myself in Bratislava on March 15th and sort of looked outside to see 65,000 or 100,000 people protesting outside. I'm wondering – I guess, two questions. First, what is it about Jan Kuciak's murder that was so different that it seemed – that so quickly mobilized a huge number of people to go out into the streets and protest in a way that doesn't seem to happen very often for similar crimes? And second, is that an effective model? Is Slovakia safer for journalists now as a result? Is this – is this something that we should seek in other countries to replicate?

MASSARO: Please.

HOLCOVA: Well, I didn't – I mean, the murder was probably just the last drop. The frustration in the society in Slovakia was already huge before the murder, and when we worked with Jan on the story, we discussed a lot what would be the impact of the story and we agreed, like, OK, we are actually proving the links between 'Ndrangheta, what is the most powerful Italian mafia, to the prime minister of Slovakia.

And this – I mean, like we need to keep it dry, not to make it, like, bombastic because we want to expose the dry facts, and we were actually saying, OK, but still nothing much is going to happen because, you know, the SMER Party is very strong. And then it – I mean, it was, like, maybe 10 days before publishing of the story when he was murdered and the – it just didn't happen any time before in the whole Central European region that they would kill a journalist for his work and that it would be so evident, and also he was very young. So you can't really put him in the context of any political games. He was 27.

So I think his profile as a journalist who was properly doing his job being murdered for the – possibly for the story of linking Mafia and the political – leading political party and the government actually just sparked the huge protests in the streets because, you know, people were already quite nervous, quite upset about a government that is in power for many, many years already. So it was just the last drop, I believe. It was shocking, and it was shocking for everyone. What was the second question? Sorry.

Q: Is that an effective model?

HOLCOVA: Well, like, killing a journalist off effective model?

Q: Protests. Popular anger.

HOLCOVA: Yes. It's not – probably it's not so important for the government that is just – you know, that could just follow the protests, see what's happening and then act on it. But it's very important for the journalists that they can see that someone cares – they are not alone. And if we really do our job properly or if we will lose our lives doing our job properly we can still bring the change because people really do care about what we are doing. So, yeah, it sends a strong message to everyone who is interested in actually living in a better society.

MASSARO: Jason, please.

REZAIAN: Yeah. I mean, you know, as I mentioned, we sent a reporter there to cover those protests and I think that that's an indication that it is successful, right. I mean, in a democratic society where you're allowed to protest the government for their action or inaction, I think that it's generally the best course of action and you bring people onto the streets to say, you know, damn it, we're not going to stand for this and there needs to be some accountability.

Now, you know, I'm not Slovakian and, from what Pavla said, the government response is not sufficient because the people that are replacing the leaders and officials who have resigned are from the same party. But, you know, the opposite – if people were just silent about it I think sends the worst message possible and I'm glad to see that there was some solidarity there and I hope that it continues.

MASSARO: Yes, please.

MAHONEY: Yeah. I mean, I think that what we saw there was something which took place in the glare of publicity in the capital city and a lot of the killings of journalists around the world are not in capital cities. There are Brazilian journalists who are covering environmental issues in, you know, the Amazon or Mexican journalists who are not in Mexico City. Their deaths don't get this kind of publicity and protests because the – you know, the national spotlight isn't on them, and that's the unfortunate part of this story is that if you are in a country which has a functioning or quasi-functioning democracy and a strong national media then the killing will get – will get attention. If you don't, the murder can go with very little attention.

MASSARO: Yes, and I think that ideally you create a culture where any murder of any journalist in your country sparks a massive protest.

MAHONEY: Exactly. That's what we're trying to do. (Laughter.)

MASSARO: Yes, please.

Q: Hello. Weston (sp) over in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Question: Has there been an example of – oh, can you guys hear me?

MASSARO: Yeah. There you go.

Q: OK. Now – there we go. There we go. Has there been an example of countries who have been able to successfully reverse the trend of murder of journalists in their country, and if they have, what was it that they did that made it so successful?

MASSARO: Any takers? Rob, maybe?

MAHONEY: Sure. There have been – there have been some examples. I think, you know, you could look at the numbers of journalists that have been killed in a country like

Colombia, for example, where there were mechanisms. You had an active civil society. You had a government that wanted to do it and you had law enforcement that could provide effective protection for journalists, and the killings of journalists declined in that – in that case.

But what we're dealing with in the cases here represented on the panel and in other countries like Russia is individual targeted assassinations and it's very difficult to prevent. You know, you can't wrap a journalist in bubble wrap and give them bodyguards. They're on the street. They're talking to people. They're vulnerable. Where you have a conflict or a war situation you can sometimes bring about mechanisms for protection. But we've seen it tried and not particularly – be particularly successful in Mexico. It was more successful in Colombia, as I mentioned.

But as I said in my remarks, more than half the journalists that are killed are murdered and we see that as something that's very worrying because you can't really take a great deal of precautions. These journalists who are targeted, who are threatened, they can change their behaviors. They can – they can – they can try to protect themselves. But the reversing of the trend is very difficult.

MASSARO: Did you want to add something at all, Erika? A question, anything with that?

SCHLAGER: Thank you, Paul.

MASSARO: Certainly.

SCHLAGER: Before we wrap up – and I know we only have a couple minutes left – I did just want to make one observation about these issues versus some things that are not being addressed here right now. I think from the Helsinki Commission perspective, there are a lot of different ways that, unfortunately, freedom of the media and freedom of expression can be restricted and the one we're – the method we are discussing today is the most serious and that's why we're here. When journalists are murdered or physically attacked, it demands our attention and we must respond.

Outside of many of the countries we've discussed here today, there is a singular situation in Turkey and I do just want to acknowledge that before we leave the room and note that the Helsinki Commission has addressed many of those issues in separate hearings relating to the state of emergency. The situation for journalists in Turkey was not good even before the state of emergency and it has gotten much, much worse since then. So just to give a fuller picture of some of the work that we do. Thank you.

MASSARO: Fantastic. Well, any more comments from the panel before we close? Any questions from the audience? We thank you all so very much for coming today and we will close the briefing. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 4:53 p.m., the briefing ended.]