

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

**“In Pursuit of Truth: Media Freedom in the OSCE Region”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chairman;  
Senator Roger F. Wicker (R-MS), Ranking Member;  
Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)**

**Witnesses:**

**Teresa Ribeiro, Representative on Freedom of the Media, OSCE;  
Jamie Fly, President & CEO, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL);  
Robert Mahoney, Deputy Executive Director, Committee to Protect  
Journalists;  
Peter Pomerantsev, Director of Arena Program and Senior Fellow, Johns  
Hopkins University, Author and Journalist**

**The Hearing Was Held From 2:56 p.m. To 4:24 p.m. in Room 419, Dirksen  
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD),  
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

**Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2021**

CARDIN: (In progress) – to explain the procedures, we had a vote on the floor of the Senate that was a 50-50 vote on a nomination. And, obviously, the vice president was necessary to be in attendance to break the tie. Whenever we have the vice president in attendance, the Democrats win. So we were able to get that confirmation. And then the second vote is the move forward on the voting issue. So it was two pretty consequential votes on the floor of the Senate.

I notice Senator Wicker was here at the appointed hour for our hearing to start and had not cast the second vote yet. So he's left to cast the second vote. As you know, he's the ranking Republican member and a strong supporter of the mission of the representative on the media freedom of the OSCE region. So he wanted me to express that, and he hopes that he'll be able to return. We're also joined by Senator Shaheen. And with that, we're going to get started. Let me just make a few opening comments and then we'll get right to our witnesses.

I'm very pleased to welcome Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro, who's here today to testify before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. I know I speak on behalf of all of our commissioners when I say how much we look forward to hearing your frank assessment of the state of media freedom and journalist safety within the OSCE region, as well as your specific goals and priorities. We also are looking forward to hearing the testimony from other expert witnesses. We have Robert Mahoney and Jamie Fly and Peter Pomerantsev, all are here to testify as well. Two are – Peter's here in person. I believe that Jamie and Robert are here virtually through the internet.

In my many years of involvement with the Helsinki Commission and the OSCE, I've always been a staunch advocate for media freedom and the safety of journalists, as it is their work that forms the bedrock of democratic process. Without access to credible, reliable, and factual information on the issues, policies, and politicians affecting their lives citizens are unable to make informed decisions about their political reality. In the era of COVID-19, with so many states and nonstate actors looking for opportunities to influence public opinion through disinformation, we need more than ever to safeguard the fundamental freedom of expression and to ensure the safety of those who perform the vital tasks of reporting the truth.

I am concerned by the continued efforts of some of the OSCE states – like Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary, Russia, and Turkey – to silence independent media. From the physical attacks to legal restrictions, media consolidation, internet censorship, and disinformation, the threats to freedom of expression are boundless and ever evolving. Freedom House recently pointed out the decline in a number of democratic states. And it parallels – when you look at the states that are declining on their democratic institutions, it parallels with their trying to silence the free media. Some leaders continue to use the pandemic as an excuse to repress independent media, and some undermine public trust in the press to conceal the own antidemocratic behavior.

As a cosponsor of the Global Press Freedom Act, I want to see the United States do even more to advance press freedom everywhere. The subject of today's hearing hits close to home. A few months ago we marked the three-year anniversary of the terrible attack on the offices of the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, Maryland, just a short drive from where we sit today. The lives of five individuals were taken that day. The assault on free press exists across the globe,

and the United States is no exception. The role of the representative of freedom of the media in advocating for the safety of journalists is indispensable. Your voice, the voice of the OSCE, matters. You have a difficult but an important job, and we on the Commission want to be as helpful as we can on you carrying out your mandate.

So after we hear from the representative – after you delivery our testimony we'll hear from Robert Mahoney, the deputy executive director at the Committee to Protect Journalists, who has joined us today by video. Following Mr. Mahoney, we'll hear from Jamie Fly, president and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, who is also here by video. And finally, we'll hear from Peter Pomerantsev, who is the journalist, author and director of Arena Program and senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins University.

With that, let me turn it over to the special representative, Mrs. Ribeiro.

RIBEIRO: Thank you. Thank you very much for giving me the floor. Dear Chairman Cardin, distinguished commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to discuss with you today the state of media freedom and of expression in the OSCE region. It's a great honor to meet with the members of your Commission, which is a strong supporter of the mandate and the role of my institution in defending media freedom and freedom of expression.

My message today is not a cheerful one. When reporting to the OSCE Permanent Council last May, providing the 57 participating states with my assessment of media freedom in the region, I stated that I saw a bleak picture. I ended my statement then by expressing the hope that I would be able to return with a more uplifting message. That will not be the case, I am afraid. During the last few months alone, five media workers were killed in our region.

In March, Turkish radio presenter Hazim Özsu was murdered; while in April, journalist Giorgos Karaivaz was shot dead in front of his home in Greece in broad daylight. In June, correspondent Maharram Ibrahimov and camera operator Siraj Abishov lost their lives in a landmine explosion in Azerbaijan. Less than a month later, Dutch investigative reporter Peter de Vries was shot on the streets of Amsterdam, dying a week later. They paid the ultimate price, while many more journalists suffered harassment, abuse, and violence.

I see a steady decline in media freedom all over the OSCE region, a climate that worries me greatly. A climate in which many do no longer seem to understand what is at stake, in which many seem to fail to recall the fundamental idea that media is more than a provider of daily news. In which many seem to have forgotten that free and independent media are one of the core pillars of our democracies. I could mention Belarus, where we witnessed the gravest deterioration. It has, therefore, been on top of my agenda since the beginning of my mandate. I have reached out to the country's leadership, but to no avail. I am in touch with the journalists in the country whose courage and commitment I salute. And I promise that I will continue to speak out on violations that need to be condemned and documented.

However, even though Belarus warrants a separate mention, journalists all over have come under mounting pressure. The recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize was a boost for two courageous journalists, and a boost for all those defending our freedom of expression on a

daily basis. But also a message that was badly needed to remind the world of the importance of this fundamental principle. It was yet another reminder that we live in a time in which accusing media outlets and individual journalists of publishing fake and biased news has become a second nature for some authorities and other vocal groups in society. A time in which a growing number of people consider it normal to harass, threaten, intimidate, and abuse media workers.

Last year, my office published a special report on the issue of the safety of media during public gatherings. For all too often, law enforcement officers hinder and abuse journalists who are reporting on such events instead of protecting them. And all too often, the anger that drives people to the streets is directed at those media workers, accusing them of being biased and of belonging to the so-called corrupt mainstream media. Your country is no exception I am afraid, with the press freedom tracker showing an increase from 39 records of such cases in 2019 to 421 in 2020. I do not need to remind you that the authorities have an obligation to protect the media and hold all the perpetrators to account.

Police reforms and training are needed, with mutual understanding and trust between law enforcement and media workers as a long-term investment. As the OSCE can be an important place to collect and develop good practices, will continue to work on this. It is, however, not only on the streets where journalists have to fear for their safety. Legal harassment and abuse of the judicial system against the media is on the rise, with the law being misused to prevent journalists from doing its work. People with power and money threaten and sue the media when they get too close to a sometimes-uncomfortable truth.

This poses a serious threat to the safety and the economic basis of media workers and outlets, and hence has a strong chilling effect on media pluralism and undermines journalistic freedom in the OSCE region. I will publish a report on this issue in the coming weeks. I'm encouraged by the fact that in some parts of the United States there is a movement towards regulation that can prevent or mitigate the effects of so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation, or SLAPPs. I'm also encouraged by the recent commitment of the U.S. administration to discontinue the use of secret subpoenas to obtain reporters' reports during leak investigations.

Aside from the streets and courtrooms, many media workers have to fear for their safety in their offices and homes when going on internet. An ever more important source of information for many journalists on the one hand, internet has also become a place of daily abuse and intimidation. Women journalists especially face threats of rape, physical violence, and graphic imagery that show up in their inboxes and on their social media platforms as they go about their workday. Nearly two out of three women journalists have had the experience of being threatened or harassed online. Having published a special resource guide in an attempt to tackle this issue last year, me and my office are committed in our fight against this threat to media pluralism.

Yet, there is more. All over the OSCE region I witnessed a downward spiral when it comes to free access to information. In the atmosphere of growing anti-media sentiment and distrust, people are increasingly caught in their own information bubble. After decades of growing access to information through new information technologies, the reappearance of

political walls and red lines have led to an ever more inward-looking approach of authorities regarding sources and flows of information.

A similar development can be witnessed in cross-border journalism. Journalists who came from or have financial ties to parties in another participating state are increasingly injured in doing their work. They face travel restrictions, administrative sanctions, outright bans, labeled as being foreign agents, and other oftentimes draconian measures. I have addressed this issue with several participating states in meetings and press releases, and in a recent – in the recent communique.

I keep reminding them that such obstructions have a notable impact on the international exchange of information, something that was always considered highly important for strengthening trust and cooperation within our region. This is a fundamental principle enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, and central to the unique concept of comprehensive security for the OSCE area. Today it results in restricted access to many of the media and information that appear as foreign, unwanted, unfriendly, non-patriotic, or simply too critical or different from the official narratives – a dangerous trend, with ever more states feeling emboldened by the restrictions of other participating states.

A word on internet intermediaries or social media platforms in particular. Public perception is that they are too powerful, too pervasive, and too unaccountable. We need to take action to protect democracy while preventing authoritarian models of governance of the platforms to prevail. In this context, we also must not forget the positive obligation of government to protect our human rights, including the right to freedom of expression online. It is a challenge we cannot simply dismiss.

In concluding, I think we are seeing a steady decrease in trust in the media and its democratic function, combined with and fueled by a growing urge to manipulate and twist independent media for their own good. This is not a new development, however with the current possibilities to spread disinformation at an incredible speed and with an enormous amount of ways to hide its true nature, this trend is becoming ever more dangerous. We need to fight disinformation, but not with more restrictive laws or by closing or suspending media outlets. Instead, we should promote quality journalism and a vibrant, pluralistic media landscape.

This is exactly what my mandate is about. As part of a regional intergovernmental framework, it is my task to engage in a dialogue with all participating states and to assist them in the upholding of their media freedom commitments. I will push to use all political and diplomatic channels at my avail to find sustainable solutions to many of these problems.

I have done so from the start. As soon as conditions allowed for this, I started to travel again. Country visits are important for meetings with all relevant stakeholders. I visited Germany, Sweden, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, and, last week, Albania, and there are more countries including the Russian Federation and the South Caucasus region in the pipeline. My aim is to visit all OSCE participating states.

To make such visits even more worthwhile, I met with journalists organizations and local media freedom experts ahead of the visits in order to be informed on the latest developments in a specific country. In the same vein, I have continued our regional conferences in both Central Asia and the Southeast Europe region.

Those are important platforms and networking locations to work with journalists and authorities on the most persistent trends in the region. With such cross-country and regional dialogue, we fully use the convening power of the OSCE to build strong networks across these regions. I hope we will soon be able to move from hybrid to more in-person meetings.

Aside from all of this, rest assured that I will continue to use my voice to draw attention to the gravest problems, especially when the life or safety of journalists are at risk. I have done so many times already and I will keep doing this.

However, in order to find long-term sustainable solutions, I always want to take into account the broader perspective, going beyond single incidents, which are often mere symptoms of systemic problems. To be able to do this properly and in a persistent manner, I need a well-staffed office, including sufficient funding and cooperation of participating states.

In this light, I want to use this opportunity to thank the U.S. for the support I have received. It is important that the OSCE and my office can count on predictable and reliable funding that keeps track with increasing demands and growing costs for I cannot do this alone. We carry a shared responsibility.

The U.S. is one of the oldest strongholds of freedom of expression. With a vibrant media landscape and civil society, your country has always been an important ally to protect media freedom worldwide. This includes the backing from cooperation with organization(s) like yours, the Helsinki Commission.

In addition, I welcome very much recent signals of renewed commitment in media freedom and freedom of expression. The OSCE, with its comprehensive security approach, is an excellent place for finding solutions to protect rights while simultaneously providing more security. I am looking forward to continue this worthy endeavor. Thank you for your attention and thank you for the invitation.

CARDIN: Well, Ms. Ribeiro, thank you very much for that very comprehensive presentation. Certainly, you have a challenging assignment, but it's so important and so consequential. So I appreciate it very much.

We'll now hear from Robert Mahoney, who is the deputy executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. We're going to hear from him, I think, via the internet.

MAHONEY: Thank you, Chairman Cardin and Co-Chairman Cohen, distinguished members of the Commission. Thank you for hosting this important hearing and for inviting the Committee to Protect Journalists to testify.

My name is Robert Mahoney and I serve as CPJ's deputy executive director. At CPJ, we've been closely tracking data press freedom across the OSCE region and our research shows that journalists and independent media have come under attack in nearly all OSCE countries. In some cases, these attacks are carried out by private individuals. For example, in Georgia, journalist Alexander Lachkarava was beaten so badly by counter protesters at an LGBTQ rights parade that he later died. Georgia has been on CPJ's radar often recently for violent attacks on journalists.

In the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, and the United States, citizens have also attacked reporters at a number of demonstrations against COVID-19 countermeasures. Journalists have been harassed and assaulted and called terrorists, pedophiles, murderers, and scumbags.

But the majority of attacks on the press are not by individuals but by governments. In Hungary and Poland, officials have captured the media landscape and financially sidelined independent media. In Tajikistan, officials have limited access to news websites, social media, and messaging apps, and in Serbia, the government has harassed and allowed smear campaigns against investigative news outlets. Turkmenistan authorities have jailed reporters for their coverage of COVID.

Sadly, these represent just the tip of the iceberg. In Belarus, the Lukashenko regime has harassed, arrested, detained, and prosecuted journalists. Most outrageously, it forced a commercial airplane to land in the capital Minsk in order to detain critical blogger Raman Pratasevich in May of this year. He is now under house arrest.

Dozens of other journalists are behind bars. Most of them are facing long prison sentences on criminal charges. This includes most of the reporters and staff for the popular news site Tut.by, which has been banned by authorities.

Authorities have also shut down the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which has monitored and documented press freedom violations and provided journalism training for over 25 years. Its offices are now closed, but group members continue to operate online, putting themselves at risk of prosecution.

In Russia, authorities have used foreign agents laws to target independent media outlets as well as foreign media outlets such as Bellingcat and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Media that reported on mass protests in support of opposition figure Alexei Navalny earlier this year have also been labeled foreign agents.

All told, the Russian foreign agents register now includes 85 people and outlets, 65 of which have been added just since the beginning of this year. In Turkey, dozens of journalists remain behind bars. The fact that Turkey, after so many years, shows – remains one of the top journalists jailers shows the extent to which the government will go to silence even the mildest criticism.

CPJ has also documented an increase in physical attacks on journalists in Turkey, including police, tear gas, and rubber bullets into a crowd of journalists in Istanbul. And many journalists in Turkey have told CPJ that they're unable to obtain press cards. Now, press cards are essential for journalists in Turkey, particularly for those reporting on politics and those in the field who must frequently present the cards to security forces.

Lastly, CPJ is deeply concerned about targeted murders in the OSCE region. In Ukraine, we have closely monitored the case of Pavel Sheremet, a Belarusian-born investigative journalist who was killed by a car bomb in Kyiv in 2016.

In Slovakia, we've supported efforts for justice for investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé, who were targeted and killed for his work, and CPJ has just returned from Malta, where we, again, joined calls for justice in the case of murdered investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Without sustained and concerted support for journalists and pushback against attacks on the press, the region will only continue to see a worsening atmosphere for journalism. As such, we at CPJ make the following recommendations to the OSCE participating states. We would like them to support the mandate of the representative on media – on freedom of the media and urge the mandate holder to robustly challenge those countries with the worst press freedom records, including Belarus, Russia, and Turkey. They should fully implement the recommendations of the 2018 Ministerial Council decision on media freedom and hold states accountable to their commitments.

They should fully implement the policies and practices recommended in the October 2020 resource guide released by the representative on freedom of the media on the safety of female journalists online. They should provide safe passage and asylum to journalists at risk of persecution in their home countries and, where possible, consider the use of targeted sanctions systems to hold governments within the region accountable for their press freedom violations and records.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to your questions.

CARDIN: Mr. Maloney, first of all, thank you for your comments. It's clear that this is widespread challenges in the OSCE states.

We will now hear from Jamie Fly from the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, also via the internet.

FLY: Thank you, Chairman Cardin, and thanks to you and Co-Chairman Cohen and Ranking Member Wicker for holding this hearing. And I also just want to acknowledge your personal and the Commission's consistent advocacy on behalf of journalists, which I deeply appreciate.

I serve as president and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, based here in Prague in the Czech Republic. We're funded by the U.S. Congress through an annual appropriation to

the U.S. Agency for Global Media, and our mission is to provide news and information to 23 countries across Eurasia in 27 languages.

And, unfortunately, I can validate what we've just heard from my other two colleagues. This hearing comes at an incredibly critical moment across our coverage area, which largely mirrors the OSCE region. We see authoritarian leaders increasing their pressure on free media, upgrading and sharing their repressive tactics, and acting with impunity throughout. Even some democratically-elected leaders, including here in Europe, where I'm currently sitting, are succumbing to the attraction of a media landscape without the independent checks and balances inherent in an impartial press.

We at RFE/RL operate in places where freedom of the press does not exist, is under attack, or where independent media are struggling to find their place, and in our coverage area that includes 18 of the participating states of the OSCE. We operate across all platforms – radio, TV, digital. We help counter disinformation and propaganda by providing what many people cannot get elsewhere – uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate.

From Belarus to Central Asia, I've just observed a disturbing decline of media freedom across all of our media markets. Well aware of the potential power of news and information, authoritarian regimes are cracking down brutally and they're targeting journalists often as their first action.

In Russia, as Robert just noted, the Kremlin has stepped up its long-running campaign against Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's journalists. We are, essentially, the original foreign agents in Russia, which they've now taken that law and expanded it to many other news organizations.

As a result of the latest attacks on us using the foreign agent tool, our Russian corporate entity is on the brink of forced closure. We currently owe, roughly, \$4.4 million in unpaid fines, stemming from the ludicrous requirement that every single piece of content that we produce for the Russian audience, from tweets to social media to web articles, be labeled as the product of a foreign agent.

And I should just note that although we receive our funding from the U.S. Congress, our journalists are Russian citizens, Russian nationals working inside their own country. They are not Americans.

The Kremlin has also started targeting individual journalists, as Robert noted. Eight of that broader list of more than 60 are RFE/RL journalists, and that requires them, once labeled, to face extensive registration and financial filing requirements. I believe the Kremlin's goals are clear. They're seeking absolute control of the information space and the advance – in advance of the end of Vladimir Putin's current term in 2024.

In Belarus, our bureau in Minsk was raided on July 16th as cameras from Russia Today followed Belarusian security forces as they destroyed our office and our equipment. Belarus is, basically, now one of the most dangerous places in the world to try to practice journalism. Since

June of last year, our journalists have spent a total of 133 days in short-term detentions and many have been forced to leave the country.

In Afghanistan, which I know is just outside of the OSCE region, we now have a government running that country which has threatened journalists for years, and I just want to flag that because half of our journalists who are based in Afghanistan remain in the country even after the collapse of the government and we continue to call on the U.S. government and other governments to prioritize the evacuation of journalists who wish to leave the country, and the provision of international travel documents and safe passage to third countries.

Meanwhile, beyond those cases, other governments, even when they're not shutting down bureaus, forcing journalists to relocate, or pursuing tactics that are no less subtle, just in the last week after some hard-hitting investigative reporting about official corruption in the run-up to their presidential election, which is this weekend, our Uzbek journalists, which who are actually based here in Europe, and they have their website blocked and have constantly denied accreditations by the Uzbek government, they received online death threats, including quotes such as, quote, "Don't think that you can hide in Europe," "I will cut your head if I catch you," and "We need to burn you all," end quote.

In the past year alone, we've lost a journalist in Afghanistan, who was murdered in a targeted killing November 2020. We've had two of our colleagues serve lengthy prison sentences and they're still behind bars – Ihar Losik, who's been held in Belarusian detention for 16 months now, Vladislav Yesypenko, who has been detained since March in Russian-occupied Crimea by the FSB and he testified in open court that he was tortured after being detained. So our journalists across our coverage area continue to face significant challenges.

Despite these pressures, they get up every day, continue to report for their fellow citizens, and they, I believe, are up to this challenge of reporting the truth in what I would say often feels like the post-truth age. They do need more support, however, and we already appreciate the support we get from the Congress but I think we can always appreciate more.

They need advocates and pressure on governments when they are put behind bars or when they or their families receive that knock on the door in the middle of the night or they try to pressure them and try to get them to quit their work or, when as our Uzbek colleagues just experienced last weekend, they receive disturbing threats online.

They need greater financial support across a region that despite this decline of media freedom is at the same time experiencing a flood of funding into other media which are not objective and not balanced, often funded by oligarchs connected to governments and sometimes funded to external actors like the Russian government, the Chinese government, that are fueling this media spending and spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation.

I'll just end by quoting one of our producers for our Russian language network Current Time who actually was displaced from Moscow due to the crackdown on our bureau there, and she now works from our bureau in Kyiv, Ukraine, Elizaveta Surnacheva. She was actually just designated as an individual foreign agent a few weeks ago on October 8th. During an interview

with Current Time, in response to this designation and this attempt to smear her work, her response was, quote, “I won’t be silent,” end quote.

With your support, despite the threats, the closures, the harassment by authoritarians across the OSCE region, our journalists will not be silenced. Thank you for – again, for holding this timely hearing. I look forward to your questions.

CARDIN: Mr. Fly, first, thank you very much for your work and the work of Radio Free Europe. We talked a little bit earlier, and I was with your counterparts in Bulgaria recently, and the work that they’re doing throughout Europe is extremely important to the United States. So we appreciate that.

We’ll now hear from Peter Pomerantsev, who is director of the Arena Program and senior fellow at Johns Hopkins University located in Baltimore, Maryland.

POMERANTSEV: (Off mic.) Thank you very much for having me today. I’m speaking last after powerful testimony, so I want to just zero in on one small issue, but which means it’s a very big issue, I think, and that’s really how some of the actual principles that we use to defend journalists are being used and being weaponized to attack journalists. So we all know – in this room, anyway – (off mic) – of the Declaration of Human Rights. I mean, most people, they know it by heart: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to seek, receive, and impart information through any medium.

You know, that premise has served us well as we look for ways to help journalists across the world kind of phrase the issue as one of censorship versus freedom of speech. And, clearly, from the testimonies that we’ve heard today, that is still a, sadly, very, very active way to understand what’s going on.

But there’s a new challenge that has appeared and that we need to get our heads around and find ways of combating it. There’s a new breed of political act which is crushing media freedom, crushing journalists, crushing opposition voices, but not through censorship. Quite the opposite: They do it through opening the floodgates and flooding the zone with disinformation and noise throughout the world. As Teresa was saying, journalists come under attack not just through governments restricting the information space, something that we can at least conceptually argue against, but with attacks from troll farms, cyber militias, online mobs who accuse journalists of being enemies of the people, fake news, undermine their credibility, and often leading to threats to their safety.

But here’s the twist. When journalists complain of coming under attack, the reply from the government or the spokespeople of the government is very cynical but it’s very crafty. They say: Even cyber militias have freedom of expressions, too. This is what you democrats always wanted. This is more information. We’re not taking away your publication. Think of Maria Ressa in the Philippines or Dmitri Muratov in Russia, winners of the Nobel Prize. All – they’re both victims of these sorts of attacks.

And, you know, when governments say these things, it's very hard to answer back, you know. There's nothing inside the language of Article 19 that talks about disinformation and that talks about flooding, that talks about online mobs or cyber militias or troll farms. There's nothing there. There's just, you know, the right to – the right to impart and receive information.

So we're placed in this very, very complicated situation where some people who want to support democracy have started asking for censorship. But that goes against the logic and spirit, and at the end of the day it goes against human rights legislation.

Now, I think there is a way out, and I think we can actually use Article 19 in a way to push back against this new form of censorship. We just have to reinterpret and kind of breathe new life into it.

The bit that's often forgotten in Article 19 is the right to receive information. We always focus on the expression, not the bit about receiving. And the problem with these troll factories and cyber militias is not so much the individual piece of content they post. One person saying you're fake news, you're an enemy of the people isn't the problem. The problem is en masse, coordinated campaign where it looks as if lots and lots of real people are saying these things online, but actually all coordinated from one single controller at the – (off mic) – or the government agency. These sort of mass inauthentic campaigns actually take away our right to receive information about their origins to understand how the information environment around us is shaped.

So we can, I think, regulate against these sorts of campaigns by – sorry, I've been told to switch on my mic. But I didn't think – OK. Good. Well, there you go. Self-censorship.

CARDIN: We were hearing you fine. So –

POMERANTSEV: It's – yeah. OK. Good. Amateur dramatics at school got me through. Great. Sorry, I was in the middle of my – of the key point of my argument.

So I think we can use the principles of Article 19 to demand a regulatory shift where these sorts of campaigns are fought back against. We can, in essence, say troll farms should become illegal, yeah? It's OK to create a(n) amplified campaign, but then you have to say: I am a bot pushing a campaign. There's a law in California which has enacted this.

But this sort of manipulation and deceptive behavior which takes away our right to understand how the information environment is shaped and formed can and should be regulated against. It's a demand for more information, not less.

CARDIN: Well, thank you very much. I particularly appreciate your last recommendation. I want to follow up on that.

But, first, let me recognize Senator Shaheen.

SHAHEEN: Thank you, Senator Cardin, and thank you to those of you who are here in person and to those people we heard from virtually.

The last Helsinki Commission hearing we had talked about some of the challenges in Belarus, and one of the recommendations from one of the people testifying was that we should think about whether there are the heads of – in this case, we were talking about social media, of those social media companies, whether it be Facebook or whatever, who might be held accountable for some of the misinformation that's provided.

Do any of you have a view about that and whether, in fact, that's one of the avenues we should consider pursuing? We were talking specifically about the shutting down of the app that was developed by Alexander Navalny for the Duma elections and whether we should try and hold the media companies that did that accountable for that.

POMERANTSEV: I think – so I think I can talk a little bit to it. I mean, look, the media companies, the social media companies, have publicly stated many times that they believe that human rights should be the – kind of the core of that, the terms of – terms of reference in there – in there and the rules under which – under which they function.

So, you know, one should probably hold them – if those are the terms and conditions that they have for the use of their platforms, then I suppose one should be able to, as a user, say, you've broken the terms and conditions under which I am using your product. I suppose the question is then where do you go.

Let's say I'm sitting in Russia or in Belarus and my app has been taken down. What is the instance that I go to and where, and an important argument that I've seen put forward, which I don't think is unrealistic, is to really have – sort of almost to be like sort of institutions of online courts that you could go to that would adjudicate in these – in these matters.

So I suppose that would be sort of the right process to go – to go through. But, you know, there is – you know, there is, obviously, you know, almost like a Strasbourg court that you could go to to say – you know, to adjudicate between what's the rules of your own country, which have just made your app illegal, and the rules on the platforms.

SHAHEEN: That was not a very satisfying answer, I got to be honest – (laughter) – because I don't see that as a real option in the future. So let me see if I can get at it a little bit differently. When you talk about the right to receive information, one of the challenges we've had in the United States – we saw it in the 2016 election, we saw it again in 2018 – was, in fact, what you describe, the disinformation – both misinformation, which I define as not necessarily deliberate, and disinformation, which is a deliberate attempt to mislead the subscribers of whatever the issue is, and whether there's anything we can do to address the audience side of that piece.

So my recollection is that as we were looking at the 2016 election one of the things we saw was that there were some countries in Europe that had more effectively dealt with the disinformation piece than we had, that in Italy, for example, there was an effort to try and

educate young people about how to recognize what's real information and what is a deliberate attempt to misrepresent something.

Do you have – do any of you have any recommendations about programs like that that you've seen that have worked? Are there countries in the OSCE that are doing some effective ways to educate the public about this problem and that you could recommend we look at? I guess that question is for you.

RIBEIRO: I'm struggling to – OK. I hope that you can listen to me properly. OK.

SHAHEEN: Yes, we can hear you.

RIBEIRO: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Senator, for this question, which is the quite crucial one.

How can we approach the problem of disinformation, misinformation? So this is the real question. And I think this is really something that requires a whole-of-society approach, definitely, a long-time investment, which involves, includes empowerment of individuals through media literacy, training of journalists in order to ensure that they are really fact checkers, but at the same time, it – there is a kind of a need to take action immediately. That's the problem: how to combine long-term investments with the need to have a response, a proper response to the urgent needs. And again, that's the reason why I mentioned before in my testimony that we need to take action, definitely – we need. And the problem of the platforms and the problem of the dissemination of the flood of information that Peter was mentioning is that the business model is very much relying on this engagement of the people. And to have the – and for that, for ensuring the engagement of the people, you need, in a way, to have impactful messages. The most impactful – they are the most – they easily – they get the attention of the users, of the individuals. So there is – the difficulty is there. We have the problem of the business model, and this is central and we need to address it. But it's very difficult because this is the business model. And that's why it's so difficult.

I think we need self-regulation, meta-regulation, but we need to find a solution. We need to find a solution and, at the same time – and at the multilateral level, because if you don't find a solution at the multilateral level, as the reach of the platforms is a global one, it will be very, very difficult to find the right solutions. I know it's difficult to engage in such a discussion at the multilateral level, but definitely we need to do so.

And at the same time, we need to have the other layers, the regional layer, the national layer, and the local layer. We need to reinforce the trust between the media and the public, and I would say that for that maybe the local level is the most appropriate one, but you have to combine these kind of efforts in a very smart way.

SHAHEEN: Well, I certainly agree with that. I think you're right; it's – but I think we've got to look at it from both sides so we're not just talking about, how do we help reporters and journalism make sure that all of the safeguards are there, that the recommendations for how to behave is there, for the journalistic standards to be there. But at some point we've got to start

addressing the audience piece, the people who are the subscribers of that information, and right now we're not doing that in any way that helps them – or at least in the United States I don't think we're doing it – in any way that helps people understand what real journalism is about, how to distinguish that from the other information they may be getting, and also why it's so important. I mean, we almost need civics in the schools to help teach – help us all relearn why a free media is so important to our democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MAHONEY: Senator, may I answer your question in part?

CARDIN: Mr. Mahoney?

MAHONEY: Yes. To the point about countering disinformation and misinformation: It goes to a loss of trust, and I think one practical approach the United States government could take and which there are suggestions in front of it is to try to combat the severe decline in local news in the United States. We have lost here thousands of newspapers, thousands of journalism jobs, and it is a proven fact that people tend to trust local news more than national or international news. And so many Americans are now living in news deserts where they are prey to the misinformation that is peddled on certain social media platforms whose business model, as Mrs. Ribeiro mentioned, is gamed on keeping them in front of screens and feeding them with stuff that will keep them – their attention.

So I would say, Congress, definitely look at providing tax credits to individuals who take out subscriptions annually to local news sources where they would be able to offset some of the costs for those subscriptions. This isn't Congress funding individual media or straying into government funding the media, which I know a lot of us would be very opposed to. But there has to be some way that the U.S. government can reverse this desertification of local news in the United States.

SHAHEEN: Well, I think that's a really important point. When we were trying to respond to COVID and the fallout from COVID over the last year, one of the things we looked at were the number of local media outlets that were going to be lost as the result of COVID and tried to provide some funding to help them get through that period so they wouldn't be lost for all of the future. But yes, that's a very good point. Thank you.

CARDIN: I want to acknowledge Senator Shaheen's work on that. As part of the small-business relief package we did provide special relief to news outlets, papers, recognizing how they were suffering from COVID-19. So – and we've been told that it was very helpful.

Mr. Mahoney, I just point out: the challenge – I'll talk local about Baltimore for one moment. Our problem is that our major daily newspaper is owned by a hedge fund operator and has no interest in the local community. We had a local entrepreneur who was prepared to purchase the paper and made the best offer, quite frankly, and would have saved the paper, but the hedge fund operator still believes they can pretty much cannibalize the operations and make more money that way. This entrepreneur has announced that he's going to start his own local

paper for Baltimore, so we're wishing him well. And he will start it as a nonprofit. And yes, we could give credits for subscriptions, but we could also encourage communities to invest in nonprofit news investigative institutions and, therefore, contributions could get the benefit of our tax code and investors can actually get a tax credit – a tax deduction for their work. So I think there are different models that we can look at, but I didn't want Mr. Mahoney's comments to go without response to the challenges we've had in Baltimore. I introduced legislation, I guess it's now about 15 years ago, to facilitate nonprofit conversions by local news operators in order to preserve local journalism.

Let me start, if I might – if I might, Mrs. Ribeiro. I want to talk about the different challenges you have. One of the things that come under your responsibility is to give best advice to the OSCE as to how we can protect media freedom. And as part of that, I would expect that you'll point out best practices, what we can do in order to protect the free media. But the challenge you have – you have certain states that have a long history of repressive actions against free media. These are autocratic countries that it's no surprise that they're going to have governmental policies that will prevent robust investigative reporting. Russia certainly falls into that category, Belarus falls into that category, and there's a host of other countries in the OSCE that fall into that category. What we're seeing now are new methods to make it even more challenging for journalists to be able to operate – the foreign registry law that we've talked about or the extrajudicial killings that we see taking place against journalists in some countries sanctioned by their governments. And then you have countries that are, we thought, on the pathway towards strong democratic institutions, seem to be taking a turn. I'll mention in that category Hungary where the Orbán government has found a way to consolidate the news organizations and be able to get government input into the news that they will cover in order to protect the power of the current government. And then you have countries that have strong laws protecting freedom of journalists, but we find that there are now safety issues in these countries and misinformation that we've talked about, sometimes coming locally but sometimes coming from foreign sources; it's coming from both sources.

So I guess my question to you: As you look at giving your best advice as to what practices need to be deployed in order to protect the freedom of the media, how do you deal with the different types of countries that are represented within the OSCE?

RIBEIRO: Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator, Chairman, for this question, which is a very key one and a very critical one because we have very different situations. You have very diversifying situations regarding rule of law, regarding media freedom, so it's a very diverse region. It's a wide membership, OSCE, with its 57 member states. But it's not any more black and white. We don't have in one – on one side we have those countries or those participating states that are in a situation where rule of law is weak, where freedom of expression and media freedom is also very weak. But we have other situations – we still have stronger rule of law, media freedom highly protected, et cetera. But still we have problems in these countries. And then we have quite a lot of countries where we have – where we can see very concerning signals of a systemic deterioration of the situation of media freedom, and I would say maybe these are the ones that are more difficult to understand and need another kind of approach, first of all, to understand what's really going on, what is really happening in these countries. And in some of these countries the incidents are not that important, but the problem is that, all

combined, they really create a landscape, an atmosphere that silence all the critical voices. And we have now this kind of category of participating states that, unfortunately, is expanding. And once again, we have to look differently for the different participating states in order to understand really what is going on and maybe we have to use different tools.

You know, the tools of the representative, the first one is her voice. The second one is, of course, advocacy. The third one is assisting the participating states, and this is very important and I think that I'm investing a lot on it and trying to persuade participating states and trying to have long-lasting effects and not just reacting on small incidents here and there but trying to have sustained results. And this is the most challenging, I would say.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

CARDIN: Thank you for that. Thank you for that.

Mr. Mahoney, I want you to concentrate for one moment on the safety of journalists, recognizing that we have a variety of countries within the OSCE, as I just pointed out, those that are openly hostile towards journalists, those who are trying to control journalism, and those that have free journalism but have safety issues. And my question to you: What should we be doing in the OSCE region to provide greater safety for journalists to protect them against the indiscriminate arrests and detentions, the type of physical violence that we've seen against journalists? What would you recommend that we consider within the OSCE region to protect the safety of journalists?

MAHONEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would begin, as I mentioned in my testimony, with the most serious crimes against journalists, which is murder, because murder is the ultimate form of censorship and we have seen in the OSCE region a number of targeted assassinations of journalists where the killers have largely gone free. I mentioned Slovakia with Ján Kuciak, Malta with Daphne Caruana Galizia, and Pavel Sheremet in Ukraine. It is absolutely incumbent upon all members to bring pressure to bear on those member states to get their justice systems to work and to bring the killers of those journalists to justice. Impunity will only send a message that journalists' lives are cheap and that those, whether it's criminal gangs or whether it's governments that want to silence criticism, can for a few thousand dollars hire an assassin and get rid of the problem. If you don't deal with that, then you're not dealing with the very basic, fundamental problems of being a journalist in that area. And I haven't even mentioned Russia where there are still, 15 years later, Anna Politkovskaya's murderers, for example, are going free. I would begin with that.

The next thing, I think, is to bring pressure to bear on those governments that continue to throw journalists behind bars, and that's what we at the Committee to Protect Journalists do. We need to document what has happened to journalists and then to be rigorous in our advocacy for getting those journalists freed. We have had some success. Governments within the OSCE which are favorable to freedom of expression and – (audio break) – have helped us, and in particular the United States Congress has helped us bring attention to those – to those countries that jail journalists. A lot of countries are very aware of their international reputation. They have diplomatic and commercial ties with countries, and they do not like being called out at

every international conference they go to, every international connection that they have with a government that they are jailing journalists. This has been effective off and on in Turkey, for example.

So those are two very, very important areas where governments need to keep a constant spotlight on the record of their fellow OSCE members. Without that, nothing else will really be (effective ?).

And then, thirdly, I would say that the – we have seen the gradual erosion of independent media through legislative and regulatory means, whether it's Russia with the foreign agents law that was mentioned, or whether in a country like Hungary or in Poland where the government is systematically capturing the media and shutting down independent (steps ?). It's up to the OSCE and blocs like the EU to (live up to ?) its own standards and enforce its own procedures to stop that media capture.

Those are just three areas, Mr. Chairman, which I think are crucial.

CARDIN: Thank you for that. I agree. Impunity needs to be – we need to stand up against impunity. And quite frankly, the numbers are shocking but they don't cause action. When we talk about how many are in jail or how many have been abused or how many have been killed, but when you put a face on it and you use examples of individuals, you can get much greater attention. So you have this offer. Our commission is fully prepared to take information from you and to work with you to set up priorities of countries and individuals where we think we need to shock the conscience of the world to action. So recognize that we are fully prepared to do that. Our commission fully participates in lots of international meetings. And my request, though, is we need to be specific with individuals so we can tell their story, rather than saying how many happen to be in jail. That doesn't quite get the same impact when we talk about someone who was taken off the streets because they happened to put out an article that was critical of the government. So we'll follow up on those points, and I thank you for your comments, and I just want you to know this is a high priority for the Helsinki Commission.

Mr. Fly, I want to give you a chance for Radio Free Europe. It's been around for a long time. You've done a lot of great things. I want you to concentrate on the OSCE region because that's what our responsibility is. We always are concerned as to whether we're using our resources appropriately for the challenges. The challenges, as you've heard in this hearing, are certainly different today than they were a decade ago, different today than they were a year ago. So where do we need to concentrate our priorities in the OSCE region with Radio Free Europe?

FLY: Thanks, Senator Cardin. It's a tough question because, as the conversation already showed, we have a variety of media landscapes across the OSCE region. We operate in countries in Central Asia where we are really the only independent alternative to propaganda outlets funded by the authoritarian government in question, and the needs of that media market are fundamentally different than Hungary, where we also operate, after relaunching our service a year ago. But the themes I'd highlight – I think Senator Shaheen's question about tech companies is an important one. We spent most of our history broadcasting through radio, through transmission towers that were either leased or owned by the U.S. government.

Authoritarian regimes tried to jam those signals, sometimes successfully, often unsuccessfully. And we still do a lot of radio, including in markets in Central Asia and Afghanistan and Iran. But more often than not, our transmission capabilities are now the social media platforms, and like every news organization around the world, we're struggling to adapt to that new reality where we don't actually control the way that we interact with our audiences, and that gives the social media companies immense power over that relationship that we're trying to build with our audiences.

And so I do think that it's worth looking at how the social media companies use that power, what their responsibilities are, how they are more – could be made more open with their audiences to give the audiences more control. I agree that in part it's about educating the audiences. But you can't even, as a media outlet, really educate the audiences if you can't reach them in the first place. And that's the fundamental problem with the way a lot of the social media platforms are structured, either because of their use of the algorithm and their manipulation of their algorithms or of their own terms of service that limit certain types of content, and this is a problem we run into in many markets in the region where they want to block certain types of political content, and almost anything that covers politics or society can be deemed as content that's too sensitive to be promoted on some social media platforms.

We also see authoritarian regimes use the social media platforms and the terms of service against independent outlets like ours. We have complaints filed against us in Russia almost every week accusing us of violating YouTube's terms of service or other social media platforms' terms of service in an attempt to shut us down. And so I think looking at those ways, both of the business model but then also at the ways the platforms exercise their power, are incredibly important.

And then I'll finally just associate myself with Mr. Mahoney's comments about pressure on regimes, about the idea of targeted sanctions against those who attack journalists and imprison journalists. And then I'd also just highlight the need for more journalist assistance programs by governments. There are already some great programs funded by the U.S. and European and other like-minded OSCE countries, but as many recent crises have shown, we need to provide safe haven and opportunities for journalists who cannot work safely in the countries that they are from, and far too often it's difficult for them to get access to those safe havens outside of their home countries. And so more focus on that by like-minded countries I think would go a long way.

CARDIN: Thank you for that.

Mr. Pomerantsev, I saved the most challenging question for last. I was intrigued with your mention of the regulations of troll farms. We all understand that technology is a blessing and that social media presents incredible opportunities. We do not want to impede upon technology and access to information. But we learned a lesson in our national elections that foreign powers, namely Russia, was attempting to interfere in our election through the use of social media and trolls and that we have laws against foreign interference in our elections. We actually think it's equivalent to an attack on our country. And it threw us into action to learn more about the source of information coming to us through social media. So we recognize that

we have to do something about identifying the source of social media. But it's tricky and any law that we develop today will be two or three years behind the most recent technology. We just can't keep up with the most recent technology. So I want you to give us your best advice as to how we handle this challenge in a country like the United States of America, which we are blessed to have a constitutional protection on freedom of speech. So how do we balance the standard that we have of freedom of expression from preventing those who are misusing our system with misinformation without identifying source? How do we deal with that challenge without jeopardizing our constitutional protections?

POMERANTSEV: That's the question that many of us have been wrestling with, and you framed it very, very accurately. I do think there's a way through. Let's just go back to the experience of a democratic citizen when they go online. Yeah. If I'm in a democracy, if I'm in a public square that's democratic, I should understand how the information environment around me is shaped. That's kind of a right that I should have, that is a right to information about information. I should understand why algorithms show me one thing and not another. I should understand why a piece of political content has been targeted at me, which of my personal data has been used to target me, whether my neighbor is seeing the opposite ad from the same political candidate, how much money they've spent, and so on and so forth. I should see when I look at a website I don't need to always know the ultimate source. There are safety reasons why you don't know that. You know, one has to sort of live in the real world, but I should know whether it's a real news site or a thousand websites that have been created in one evening and shot out by a PR company somewhere. I should know that if I want to be in a democratic information environment. We can't have a public square in this kind of funhouse mirror distortion we live in. And listen, that is a democratic demand, it's a bipartisan demand, and this is the demand that the Chinese and the Russians and the Erdogans do not want. They do not want their own people knowing how they game their domestic algorithms. They don't want their own people understanding how they use, you know, coordinated, inauthentic behavior to distort their – it's not even a public square, you know – their disinformation environments.

So this is – I'm not talking about regulating content. We're talking about regulating types of behavior. We're talking about a more transparent architecture. I'm getting a little bit hungry at this time so I'm thinking – think of it like a restaurant. You know, in modern restaurants you can see the kitchen. You know, it would be kind of weird going to restaurants where they just bring you your food and then tell you what's there. So we should have that kind of 20/20 vision about how our information environment is shaped. I don't think that is about – I don't think we should or can go down the path of trying to regulate pieces of content. That's not something we can or should do.

So there is a way through, and I think democracies can reach consensus over it and that will become a new marker of the difference between a democratic public space and a nondemocratic one.

CARDIN: Well, thank you for that. I think you've oversimplified the problem a little bit but I accept your definition about it. The restaurant example is a good example, but we'll see. It's a little bit more complicated with our constitutional protections, even with identity, so it's

not as simple. But I agree with – we don't want to – we never want to control content. We want to know where the source is. I agree with you on what –

POMERANTSEV: Just very quickly, I think anonymity is a right. I think a person has the right to wear a mask to party for safety reasons, but many, many, many reasons. We're not talking about individual anonymity. I think that's a complete red herring. We're talking about when – you know, we're not talking about one person being anonymous online. We're talking about, you know, a thousand fake accounts pretending to be one person. We're talking about that sort of fundamental distortion of our reality. So I am all for the right to anonymity. I'm very much – I think that needs to be protected. That can be unpleasant, for obvious reasons, but I think that is a fundamental right.

CARDIN: We have been joined by not only the Republican leader on the Helsinki Commission but also the senior vice president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, in Senator Wicker.

WICKER: Well, thank you, Senator Cardin. And I am just going to comment that if he's good at oversimplification, perhaps he should run for Congress. (Laughter.) We're bad at taking out commercials saying it's just a simple solution, all you need to do is X, Y, and Z.

Let me make three or four paragraphs in the form of an opening statement and then maybe ask a question. But this is a very important hearing. I was here first, I want you to know.

CARDIN: We acknowledged that, that you were on time.

WICKER: These Democrats were trying to find the vice president and get her to break a tie. And I was here. And then I had to go, so I'm back. But I'm glad we're – I'm glad to be here, my dear friend, Ben Cardin, to strike a blow for freedom of the press. It's a foundational principle of any healthy democracy. And unfortunately, journalists around the world are regularly attacked, intimidated, jailed, or even killed for simply putting out the truth.

According to statistics from Reporters without Borders, as many as 358 journalists are currently in prison worldwide. Three hundred and fifty-eight. And 29 journalists and media workers have been killed this year. Hard to believe in the year 2021. Having had the opportunity to travel around the world and meet with journalists and leaders alike, I've learned that autocrats who silence the press do so because they're fearful that their own undemocratic behavior will be exposed. They want to hide their corruption, abuses of power, and human rights violations.

It is inspiring that even in the face of these threats and dangers courageous journalists around the world continue to pursue and report the facts. I was heartened to see the Nobel Prize – Nobel Peace Prize winners Maria Ressa and Dmitri Muratov honored for their contributions to democracy and peace. Good journalism and unflinching investigative reporting are important now more than ever.

Let me just ask one question, because I know people have come and gone and the hour has gotten late. Distressed about Turkey. And I mentioned the figure of 358 journalists currently imprisoned. Turkey has jailed over 200 media workers over the last five years. I'm sure they're not all in jail now, but it's a staggering number for a NATO ally. Turkey's seen a precipitous decline in media freedom over the last few years. It's one of the worst jailers of journalists in the world. Staggering to think that these numbers apply to a country that through many international covenants took upon itself to protect freedom of speech and of the press.

Is there hope for improvement? What are the trends that our witnesses are seeing with regard to our NATO ally of Turkey? No answer?

MAHONEY: Yes, Senator, thank you very much.

Well, the Committee to Protect Journalists currently has at least 37 journalists behind bars in Turkey. And that's probably a conservative estimate. For 20 years we've watched the gradual decline of press freedom in Turkey. It got much worse after, you'll remember, the attempted coup back in 2016. And I'm afraid that, you know, the OSCE, the European Union, and many other blocs have just not been able to affect any improvement in the landscape for journalists in Turkey.

And we have prevailed upon them to do more, but President Erdoğan seems to be able to lord it over the media landscape. There's very little – very little criticism of him or of his regime. And those that do stand up, are closed down. I'm actually very, very concerned that that example that you mentioned of a NATO member, of a one-time aspirant to join the EU, should still be able to get away with jailing journalists and intimidating everyone into silence.

WICKER: It is a concern. And at least I wanted to – I didn't want this opportunity to go without raising it. They're our friend. We depend on them. We need each other. But this is completely unacceptable, and we need to speak out and do what we can.

Mr. Chairman.

CARDIN: Well, Senator Wicker, I agree completely. You know, Turkey presents a unique challenge to us, because it's a NATO ally. And not only is it doing repressive – it's not just journalists. Their crackdown on their democratic institutions, and then, of course, getting the S-400 defense system from Russia which is inconsistent with their NATO commitments – it's a country that presents unique challenges. But if they don't adhere to the fundamental principles of democracy, it is going to be a very difficult path forward. So I agree with you.

And as this hearing has shown, every country in the OSCE has challenges. We have those countries that by government policy make it unsafe for journalists to do their business and make it very difficult for them to be able to conduct their business. We have other countries that are trying to control the media, as we saw by the actions in Hungary where they were consolidating the news under Mr. Orbán's control. And that's – Poland's also following in that – in that model. And then we have the misinformation that we talked about, on social media, in

countries including the United States, where we have the trolls that are operating that are trying to flood the information to make it very difficult for journalists to get their message across.

So fortunately, we have a great representative here for the media freedom, who's going to – is committed to visiting every country in the OSCE. She said that right here. We have that on the record. And she started with the United States. It's a good start. And we wish you only the best in your mission. I can assure you, you will have the support of the Helsinki Commission here in the United States. We're to do everything we can to support your mission. And as I've said to our other witnesses, this Commission stands ready to work with you on protecting individual journalists, as well as putting a spotlight on those leaders of countries that are violating their commitment for freedom of the media.

So we are prepared to take action in this Commission. And I can assure you, it will be – our Commission always operates in a strong, unified way. So under Senator Wicker and myself, we are going to be working together in a unified front to promote the values of the OSCE. We believe in it. And part of that is the safety and freedom of the media.

With that, if there's no further comments or business, the Commission will stand adjourned, with our thanks to all four of our witnesses.

[Whereupon, at 4:24 p.m., the hearing ended.]