

Today, freedom of the press and freedom of speech are under considerable pressure.

Take, for example, Syria and Afghanistan.

Societies which do not operate on a democratic basis.

In such countries today the reasonable pre-conditions for carrying out journalistic work are simply not in place.

Last year, more than 100 journalists were killed across the world. 95% of them were local journalists. Local journalists simply trying to do their job.

More than 100 journalists killed during a single year is of course totally unacceptable. And this year so far there is more than 60!

Threats and violence against journalists are, in the end, an attack on an individual. To kill or injure a person is always unacceptable.

But to attack a journalist is also about so much more. Because this is not only an attack on an entire profession, but also on freedom of expression. Which is crucial for a well-functioning democracy.

In the digital world, there are now new opportunities to communicate. To get messages across. To engage and to mobilise. That is of course great. But...

These possibilities are equally available to forces who wish others harm – those who uses violence and who have total disregard for the principles of democracy.

Previously, these people had no capacity of their own to reach out. What a journalist chose to report determined how an audience would perceive a situation.

But that is no longer the case.

Today, they can spread their propaganda with ease both digitally and socially.

A journalist who wants to provide an alternative perspective becomes instead a threat – which must be silenced.

But freedom of the press and freedom of speech are being restricted also closer to home, in parts of Europe.

Here the problems are strongly linked to policies that are unfortunately being pursued in an increasing number of countries.

Take Hungary for instance

The conditions for carrying out independent, critical investigative journalism had changed. Approximately 1000 journalists from Hungarian public service broadcasting have been fired and a new media authority is in place with board members loyal to the government. Just some weeks ago there were massive protest when one of the major newspapers were closed down.

The consequences of today's Hungarian media policy have been extensive. Hungary has plummeted down the press freedom index of Reporters Without Borders. Today, it is in 67th place, just behind Georgia and Malawi.

The Law and Justice Party in Poland shocked Europe by essentially copying the policies being implemented in Hungary. For example, the Polish Minister of Finance now has the power to dismiss board members within public service.

In one year, Poland has fallen 29 places on the press freedom index. ^[3]

In Croatia, 70 journalists and the head of the public service broadcaster HRT were fired last summer after the National Conservative Party took power in the country.

And - Of course, it is also impossible to ignore the situation in Turkey. News sites were blocked, the broadcasting licences of about 20 radio and TV stations were revoked and hundreds of journalists from the Turkish Public service company TRT were suspended from their jobs after the attempted coup.

This overview of examples could go on and on.

As I see it, fundamental values in Europe are now at stake.

Some people want to make public service broadcasting a mere stamp of quality. But public service broadcasting is fundamentally about so much more than that. Public service broadcasting is about independent media organisations that are separate from the state, which are financially independent and which have a clear remit with impartiality at its core.

It is important to have strong public service broadcasting side by side with strong commercial media – what is generally called an effective dual system. It is a system that clearly promotes a well-functioning democratic society.

What worries me is that societies without a functioning media are also a breeding ground for extreme political movements.

^[3] 18th out of 179 in 2015. 47th out of 179 in 2016.

I am concerned about the situation in the world and in Europe, but I am also worried about the future of the freedom of the press and freedom of speech in the Nordic countries.

In early summer, Swedish Radio presented a survey that we undertook with the Swedish Media Publishers' Association where we asked our employees if they had been threatened or harassed in the past year.

Approximately one third of journalists have been threatened or harassed in the past year. And this is not just on odd occasion – many suffer from this several times a week.

And this is in my home country of Sweden. The country that together with Finland has the oldest legislative safeguards for freedom of the press in the world. A law that goes back 250 years.

An important role in the future will therefore be played by the democratic institutions in our countries and ultimately by our elected representatives:

- Politicians make laws. They should safeguard freedom of the press and freedom of speech even if it, compromises the absolute rights of the individual.
- Politicians can put pressure on other politicians. I think that politicians – when they travel to other countries, should ask – do freedom of the press and freedom of speech apply here? And if not – why not? Are there journalists in prison? If yes – you should request that they immediately be released.
- Politicians also have an opportunity to control aid. Why should countries that today do not safeguard freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and which imprison journalists get millions of crowns in aid, sometime entirely free of conditions?
- Politicians can protest. What is currently taking place in parts of Europe strongly affects the EU. There are strict requirements for membership in the EU. It is far from clear what should happen when those who are members no longer live up to the requirements for membership.
- Politicians must protect journalism and do everything they can so that journalists can do their jobs without being threatened and harassed. This involves reviewing legislation.

All this is important if we want to protect well-functioning democratic societies and a Europe where Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Speech are still fundamental values that we all respect and protect.