

Pledging event on taking commitments to defend media freedom

STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, Mr. Jiří KOZÁK

We are pleased to contribute to defending media freedom with the following commitments:

Becoming a new member of the Executive Group, the Czech Republic is stepping up its active engagement within the Coalition. We will continue our support for independent journalists and other engaged voices, both online and offline, by speaking out on their behalf on the international scene, by defending journalists at risk and by providing emergency visa to those in need.

We will use our diplomatic network as well as close contacts with civil society and media outlets themselves. For the fourth year in a row, we will once again earmark a voluntary contribution to the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund. Here I would like to thank the Fund for its important work in enhancing journalists' legal protection and improving media freedom. We will also continue to provide financial contributions to the Digital Defenders Partnership programme initiated by the Freedom Online Coalition. Media freedom will also feature among the Czech priorities during our upcoming EU Presidency in second half of the year.

Nationally, the Czech Republic will continue its direct project support within the Transition Promotion Program, an indispensable part of our foreign policy and development cooperation, for the past sixteen years already. Using our own experience with the social transition and democratization of the country, we will be working closely with civil society and independent media to support human rights and strengthen democracy and the rule of law in countries like Belarus, Myanmar or Cuba.

We will continue close cooperation with independent media outlets such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, including by providing funding for Václav Havel and Jiří Dienstbier Journalism Fellowship Programs. As in the case of Ilhar Losik, our common aim remains to support aspiring independent journalists in the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia and the Western Balkans.

On behalf of the Czech government, let me renew our commitment to the Global Pledge on Media Freedom. Fully aware of the challenges ahead, this task does not stop at our borders. At home, we are equally committed to ensuring independence of the Czech public media through sustainable financing and protection from political influence.

Clear accountability for attacks against journalists is what is needed. Therefore, our government will propose a national sanctions legislation (Magnitski Act if you will) by the end of next year.