

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The FCO and global media freedom, HC 1920](#)

Tuesday 7 May 2019

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Ann Clwyd; Stephen Gethins; Conor McGinn; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell; Royston Smith; Catherine West.

Jo Stevens also attended.

Questions 1-40

Witnesses

[I](#): Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, Barrister, Doughty Street Chambers, Julie Posetti, Senior Research Fellow, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, Olga Robinson, Russia and Disinformation Specialist, BBC Monitoring, and Professor Jackie Harrison, UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety, and the Issue of Impunity, University of Sheffield.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC, Julie Posetti, Olga Robinson and Professor Jackie Harrison.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Thank you very much for coming.

Q1 **Priti Patel:** The theme that we are here to discuss today, global media freedom, is obviously highly topical. The first question is to all of you. In the light of what we are seeing now, with threats to the media and to journalists rife and epidemic in some parts of the world, why are so many journalists continuing to be killed around the world? Would you please talk about journalists who are killed outside war zones in particular?

Julie Posetti: My name is Julie Posetti. I am a research fellow with the University of Oxford's Reuters Institute for the study of journalism. I have done quite a bit of research for UNESCO on a range of issues that intersect with this. I will defer to Jackie on some of the physical threats and details surrounding the murder with impunity of journalists internationally.

From my perspective, it is a combination of threats and a convergence of threats, offline and online. We are now seeing the weaponisation of journalism, if you like, by political actors internationally, particularly those operating in despotic contexts. We can also identify actors in the West. We have seen incidents in eastern Europe where journalists have been targeted and murdered, and the same in Latin America. We have also seen, for example in the US, the demonisation of journalists and the deployment of terms designed to whip up sentiments that are designed to cause a mob reaction, whether that is online or offline.

When you have an online mob attacking and assaulting journalists and journalism, the risk of that overflowing into the physical realm increases, particularly when we see technological threats such as deepfake videos, where AI technology is used to try to misrepresent journalists. We can go into this later, but female journalists are being targeted in particular; they are being misrepresented as porn stars, exposing them to increased physical risk in their own environments. We have a combination of technological factors, failures in terms of the existing international legal and normative frameworks and the domestic ones, and these digital threats. I will leave my response there.

Professor Harrison: My name is Jackie Harrison and I am from the University of Sheffield. I run the Centre for Freedom of the Media and I am a UNESCO chair on media freedom, journalism safety and the issue of impunity. We study a lot of this, and what we find is that a lot of what is happening is overlapping. One of the drivers is impunity—the fact that individuals or groups can attack journalists with impunity—which is also about a disregard for the rule of law; that emboldens other actors to do the same, and on it goes. There is definitely a spiral of impunity.



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Journalism itself is becoming more potent. It is seen in some respects as something that can destabilise political regimes, for good or for bad. The power of journalism to destabilise is something that individuals often want to close down. Half of the killings are now undertaken in non-conflict zones. That is the chilling aspect; it is both an attack on the idea of journalism itself—the conceptualisation of it, and how important it is—to try to diminish its standing as, I would say, an institution in civil society.

It is also about the entitlement to attack journalists not being undermined by the very response of journalism to those attacks. In other words, we go down this route of impunity, lack of public information, disinformation and on it goes. Part of the problem sometimes is the civil standing or status of journalists and journalism in different contexts. That is really something that needs to be addressed as part of the narrative around all this, rather than it being linked to democracy or any other kind of big concept. If you think of journalism as being part of civil society building, its attack is a form of civil diminishment that undermines that very process, and that is part of it.

Would you like me to talk about the range of threats and hazards?

Q2 Priti Patel: I would like to know what other threats are out there. I know we have touched on technology, but the range of threats in particular would be helpful.

Professor Harrison: Sure. They range from the ultimate form of censorship, which is a killing. You can go through arbitrary detentions, kidnapping, psychological threats, online threats, and attacks that are physical but not lethal. They can be intimidatory, shutting down news organisations or destroying kit—it goes on.

It is actually a scale. At the end of that scale, one of the other threats is the attack on the idea of journalism itself. That is part of the whole sliding scale. Our research has shown that when a journalist is killed, it is very unusual for the killing to just be out of the blue. There has usually been a range of attacks or threats in the meantime. Those are not particularly systematically stored in datasets, but we are starting to look at that to see what the story—the event of the killing—would tell us vis-à-vis its background, and the progress to get to that point.

Priti Patel: May I come in on that point, and build on your answer a bit? Of course, news organisations naturally have a responsibility for journalists themselves who are out in the field working in some very difficult parts of the world. How do they prepare for sending journalists in, knowing that they might be going into some of the most horrific environments? As you have already highlighted, a killing does not happen automatically; a spate of activity will have led to it. What kind of measures do they put in place?

I am sorry to labour this, but we are here as the FAC, overseeing the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. How do you see the British Government, UNESCO and key institutions giving support out in the field to those who need to be protected, as well as giving voice to the whole



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process of what they are trying to report back from the field, and stand up and represent?

Professor Harrison: The answer to what sorts of protections there are and how a journalist is prepared is that it is very patchy. I suppose the amount of resources that will be put into it depends on the prosperity of the news organisation. A lot of news organisations will do a really strong course: they will send journalists on hostile training, they will give them kit, and they will insure them. I think most media organisations in the UK would do that, and that would be a very important part of it.

Around the world, of course, it is a different story. A lot of the journalists who are getting killed are local journalists who are not so protected. They are not insured. If they get injured they may well lose their job anyway because they cannot continue to work. In terms of protections or contributions that can be made to facilitate news organisations around the world to help them to understand that journalists need that level of protection—capacity building among media houses as well. Quite often, journalists just get cut adrift. Then, we have got on top of that a whole layer of freelancers, the informal journalists who are not protected at all. You would have to see it as a multi-layered problem regarding who gets protection and who does not. We need to drill down into some sort of capacity building, to show that journalists deserve that level of protection.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I agree very much with what Julie and Jackie have just said. Just to introduce myself, I am a human rights barrister, Caoilfhionn Gallagher, QC. I lead the Doughty Street international media defence panel. That panel includes Helena Kennedy, who did the investigation with Agnes Callamard into Jamal Khashoggi; Amal Clooney, who has been appointed in the special role to the Foreign Office; Jonathan Price—he is behind me—who works on a number of cases with me; Jennifer Robinson and others.

There are just a few things I want to pick up on following on from what has been said by Julie and Jackie. The first point concerns killings. Some of the work I do is acting for bereaved families. You may have been alerted by the Clerk to the fact that, sitting behind me in the room today, you have two relatives of journalists who were assassinated: Paul Caruana Galizia, whose mother Daphne Caruana Galizia was assassinated in a car bomb in October 2017; and Jeremy Bliss, whose cousin Christopher Allen was killed in South Sudan in August 2017. As Jackie rightly said, assassinations are the ultimate form of censorship, and in Daphne Caruana Galizia's case it came after decades of harassment and targeting of her and her family. One of the key issues for that family is that this was an entirely predictable risk that was then realised in October 2017, and of course it happened on European soil, in a Council of Europe and European Union country, not in a warzone. As with half the cases in 2018, this is not a warzone situation. Both Daphne and Christopher were freelancers. That is quite important given the question you asked about news organisations. Many of those at risk and many of the bereaved families we work with are people who are operating in a freelance-type environment. They do not

necessarily have that form of structure from the BBC World Service, or Reuters in the Myanmar case, that you may see with others.

That is the first issue. These cases do not come out of the blue and they are part and parcel of a culture over a period of time that is often indicative of risk to those individual journalists, and often indicative of risk to journalists more generally.

The killings themselves then have a chilling effect on other journalism. It would be helpful if we could provide you with some more information about the chilling effect on journalism in Malta more generally as a result of Daphne's killing and what is happening to Caroline Muscat at The Shift and so on. I understand that the family intends to provide you with written submissions in more detail about Malta. The killings send a message and they can have a chilling effect on other journalism.

The second point I wanted to touch on is the fact that I do find quite often that much of the focus, very understandably, is on the very extreme examples—the assassinations, the imprisonment. In many of the cases that we do, we see that when someone is released from prison, the spotlight moves. It happens a lot in Egypt, for example. When you have a journalist who is released, as my client Amal Fathy was, the international media and press attention and international diplomatic pressure move away, when in fact those journalists often continue to be under very extreme restrictions on their ability to report. Amal Fathy is a good example: she has got a two-year suspended sentence and she is no longer in custody—she was released over Christmas—but she has got to report back regularly to the authorities and she is being watched. It has been made very clear to her that if she reports in a way that the authorities do not like, she will be back behind bars. It is important that, as well as the extreme examples, we look at that.

The third and final point—I am conscious of time—is a powerful example of the wide range of threats to which journalists and media workers are exposed: the case of BBC Persian. One of the BBC Persian journalists, who is also my client, Kasra Naji, is sitting here today. The vast majority of BBC Persian journalists are UK nationals, they are based in London—they are here—and they are being harassed and targeted by Iran in a cross-border way. When you were asking earlier about the new emergence of threats, that is a particular issue that concerns me. I hope we come back to it later in evidence.

The cross-border nature of threats is a concern. It is not unusual for Iran to target journalists within its own border, and Iran has done so for many years. It did it to Jason Rezaian. There are many high-profile examples of journalists being imprisoned by Iran within Iran, but what is new is the multi-faceted way of threatening journalists and using the long arm of the state to try to silence people outside. That is also a feature in the case of Daphne Caruana Galizia. She got a series of threatening letters from UK-based law firms threatening her with multiple libel suits. Her family is still defending many of them posthumously. That cross-border issue is critical, and we should be alert to that.



Q3 Chair: We have asked for submissions from journalists around the world through the International Press Institute. We only asked recently, and a few have already come in. We had some video testimonies that we put online, and one of them is from Khadija Patel of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper in South Africa. She raises the issue of the growing threat of harassment and surveillance of journalists, particularly using electronic means. I am aware that some of the great consumers of espionage technology sold by certain states have been countries that would not traditionally have been particularly internet-capable, but they are using these new capabilities specifically to hassle, undermine and deceive journalists domestically in order to spread fake propaganda. Is that the sort of thing that you are seeing against BBC Persian? Is that the sort of thing you are seeing against others? What can the UK do to help?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: The short answer is yes, that is something that we are seeing. You have a submission from the BBC World Service, the National Union of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists giving some detail about BBC Persian. We are seeing a lot on this specific issue of the weaponisation of social media. Earlier, Julie referred to the particular targeting of female journalists, and we are certainly seeing that. We are seeing journalists, in particular female ones but also many male ones, becoming the subject of fake pornography, for example. Material is circulated about them to try to discredit them in the eyes of the Iranian public.

We have seen some horrifying detail. Kasra Naji, who is here today, spoke at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last year. This was the first time a journalist from the BBC World Service had addressed the Human Rights Council. As a result of the powerful speech he gave in Geneva, he and his colleagues have been targeted. There is a particular role there for the international community. We made a complaint on behalf of the BBC World Service to the United Nations about journalists being targeted specifically for using international mechanisms. We would greatly welcome public support for that from this Committee. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Julian Braithwaite in Geneva have been very supportive, and have said that they are critical of Iran targeting journalists specifically for using international mechanisms. We must crack down on that. If journalists are targeted for using those mechanisms, it removes a crucial legal avenue for us to put pressure.

I have seen that trend in many of my cases. A number of my Egyptian cases, for example, have involved journalists being targeted as a result of going to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention or to David Kaye, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression. The international community must crack down on that.

Q4 Chair: You will find that you are pushing at an extremely open door here when asking for support in condemning such action, and you know that. Indeed, that is why we are holding this inquiry. What effect does public condemnation have, either at national governmental level or at parliamentary level?



Caoilfhionn Gallagher: "It depends" is the short answer. It depends on the country. To give you a couple of different examples: I act for a large number of journalists within Egypt, and in the case of Egypt the country is responsive to international pressure. When criticised bilaterally and at UN level, Egypt responds by saying, "We're supporters of freedom of expression. Here's what it says in our constitution." They are responsive to that kind of pressure. They are often responsive in a way that means that you need to leave sufficient room for them to take some action within their own domestic law, but they certainly are responsive.

A country like Equatorial Guinea is at the other extreme. They do not engage when the UN criticises them. If you are acting for clients there—we acted for a cartoonist who was detained due to his political satirical cartoons last year—the pressures that need to be placed on them are different, because they are much more responsive to commercial pressure. So I am afraid the short answer is that it depends.

But I do think that some of the criticism that you see online when there is a high-profile case and people are shouting from the rooftops about a case, as they did about the Reuters journalists who were freed this morning, is misplaced, because the reality is that many states, many Governments, are very responsive to an international spotlight being shone on their cases. Often, silence about those cases or speaking about them only behind closed doors will benefit only the regime and not the journalist who is being detained or harassed. But it depends on all the circumstances.

There is one specific issue that I want to raise, but I can do it later if it is easier. It is specifically about impunity and a potential recommendation that we would like to ask the Committee to make.

Chair: Can we come back to that?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: Sure.

Julie Posetti: I have just finished a report that was published by the Reuters Institute, which focused on South Africa, the Philippines and India—specific newsrooms there dealing with a range of media freedom threats and looking at the ways they were responding. I spent a week with Maria Ressa and her team at Rappler in the Philippines. She has become a cause célèbre for speaking boldly and publicly against those threats. I know that she has said publicly before, and she would want me to say again, that the international community's support for her and for her capacity to do independent journalism under threat is something that was very meaningful and allowed the organisation Rappler to continue to operate with a sense of being shielded.

As much as the international mechanisms are important, there is also the collective action that can support journalists on the ground to continue to report under the threat of enormous pressure and fear of violence. We have multiple roles to fulfil in that regard. We also have a role—I am a journalist by training—as the international journalistic community to not

just lobby and speak in environments such as this, but report robustly and quite fiercely on some of these threats, because there is evidence that shining a light and ensuring that we continue to enable our colleagues to speak truth to power makes a difference.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: On the imprisonment issue, it is worth saying that often in cases where there has been an international spotlight shone, we find that even if the individual remains in prison, their conditions are better and it gives them a form of protection. That is something that Peter Greste in Australia has spoken about very powerfully.

That is all the more important in cases where you do not have a dual national. Usually, when you have a dual national such as Peter Greste or Mohamed Fahmy, they already have a Government in their corner. Where people are profoundly at risk is when they are not a dual national. In those cases, it is all the more important that a spotlight is shone. It certainly protects them, even behind bars. That has been the story from Peter Greste and Ibrahim Halawa—for many who have been imprisoned and seen their conditions improve because the world is watching.

- Q5 **Royston Smith:** On trying to shine a spotlight on some of these persecuted journalists and people who are being locked up, the FCO has been criticised recently about how much effort it has put in for a particular journalist. The FCO would want to do its best for British nationals or for any journalist—that is a theme that it is picking up for this year—so what is the best way for it to identify, protect and raise cases of persecution? People think that when a British national is being persecuted somewhere abroad and does not necessarily have to be, the FCO will just intervene and everything will be fine, and of course that is not the case. What is the best way for them to do that?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: It depends on the context. In many cases, that will involve the FCO needing to raise matters at the highest level in their bilateral relations with the country. Then, depending on the context, it may be helpful for them to raise it in international forums such as within European Union mechanisms and within United Nations mechanisms.

I should say that there is a powerful example today of the benefit of the FCO speaking out. As I know the Committee will be well aware, prior to Jeremy Hunt being in post, Myanmar was not a case on which public statements were made. It is very welcome that he did in fact make public statements and that he was willing to speak out. The combination of factors that has resulted in the pardon today and the release of those journalists to their families is multifaceted, but certainly the UK speaking out publicly was helpful.

I have in mind some examples in Malta, where the Foreign Office has not spoken out publicly. One concern felt by Daphne Caruana Galizia's family is that the Foreign Office should be speaking out, particularly about countries where it has influence, such as Myanmar and Malta. One initial concern we had when considering the proposal for the event in July, was that it might be seen by some to focus on the threat to freedom of



expression as being a risk far away in Mexico or the Philippines. It is essential that at the centre of that event in July we have individuals from countries where the UK has great influence, such as Malta, or other European Union countries, where three journalists have been killed within 18 months, and a fourth—Lyra McKee—very recently. We must also hear from bodies such as BBC Persian, and UK nationals here who are being persecuted. It is important that that happens. July should not simply be about free speech being something far away; it should be about countries where the UK has great influence, including within the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as countries such as Iran, because those affected are based here.

Q6 Royston Smith: Part of the FCO's campaign is to push countries for legislation to protect journalists. Is that the correct priority for the FCO? We know that legislation is one thing, but enforcement is something else.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: Is that question to me? I am happy to answer it.

Royston Smith: Whoever—you are all experts.

Julie Posetti: I will answer it and then I will pass it to Jackie. I think this is important. It is important to enable the local manifestation of international frameworks that are designed to defend human rights—particularly privacy and freedom of expression—and enable robust investigative journalism. Action and enforcement are obviously problematic—I am sure Jackie will tell you that Mexico has some of the strongest laws defending journalists internationally, yet one of the highest rates of murder with impunity. There is a disconnect between the law and the way it manifests itself.

I wrote a book for UNESCO called *Protecting journalism sources in the digital age*, and like many other publications built on research—it covers 121 countries—it is full of great recommendations and model legal frameworks that can be useful in informing what is recommended at global level, as well as what is influenced at local level. The book goes to something that the Chair referenced earlier, namely surveillance and the weaponisation of social media, and the way that that is interfering with the capacity of journalists to do their work, either by exposing them to digital attacks, or by undermining their private communications with sources. Such communications are vital to enable ongoing investigative work that holds Governments and other power brokers to account.

One threat we are seeing emerge for journalists—we focused on this in the post-Snowden era and must continue to focus on it—links up with disinformation and journalistic safety, and concerns the ongoing incapacity of existing laws to be implemented with effect for a digital era, or gaps in those existing laws. For example, source protection is the right of a journalist to defend the anonymity of their source or the whistleblower they are working with, which overlaps with all these issues. We could have a situation where my notebook may be protected, but my phone or laptop will not be. That problem is not exclusive to countries where the risks are massive for journalists when such intervention occurs, whether under



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surveillance or if their data is intercepted, because national security overreach is happening in the west as much as anywhere else. I would recommend a holistic examination that takes into account the physical and digital, as well as the local and the international. At the intersection of a range of other issues such as disinformation, there is an important opportunity to ensure that whatever laws are considered, they are understood to operate in a complex, multi-faceted environment.

Professor Harrison: I think one of the things that is often forgotten in implementing things from the top downwards is the everyday lived experience of people. It is important that that is very much part of it, whether it is academia who brings that to the party or whether there is some other research on the ground, because quite often, as Julie said, there is a massive disconnect between the intentions through law, through different structures and frameworks, and the actual experience that journalists are living through every day in different places.

As I said, part of this is about helping with capacity building; part of it is also about encouraging political leaders, and condemning them if they start to denigrate journalists. It is a bigger, wider framework than just changing the law. Laws are obviously incredibly important, but it is also more about the culture in which journalists operate, and also trying to build civil societies and capacity building. Journalism is not something that is just free at some point; it should be part of civil society building, state building and development.

It tends to be the thing that's always thought, "Right, now we can turn to free journalism because a society's improving." It has to be part and parcel of the development of that society. It is really important to include those kinds of sentiments in any kind of intervention, and invest to provide resources to do that, whether it be improving regulatory bodies, improving media literacy for audiences. It is a big picture.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I have three quick points, just following on. I will not repeat anything Julie and Jackie said; I very much agree with what they said. First, I think the reform of legislation is an important focus for the Foreign Office, but it should not be the exclusive one. The UK has a particular role to play, particularly in relation to anti-terrorism legislation and so on. In many cases, the laws that are used against journalists are a colonial overhang—they come originally from us, I'm afraid. I say that as an Irish person; I will be criticised for that.

However, the question is a very good one. There is often a fundamental mismatch between legal standards and enforceability on the ground, and in all of those examples that I have given, you have countries that have a constitution that parrots free speech. Many of those countries have signed up to the universal declaration on human rights; many of those countries are European countries that are subject to the European convention on human rights and the charter, for example. Even still, you see this difficulty.



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That is why the recommendation I mentioned earlier, which we very much have in mind, concerns the issue of impunity. A common thread in the three European cases involving the deaths of journalists in 2017-18—so Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in Slovakia, Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, and Victoria Marinova—is concerns in Council of Europe and European Union member states regarding the rule of law and the inadequacy of the investigation mechanisms.

Impunity is about much more than some of the submissions to you might suggest, which refer just to perpetrators being jailed. Impunity is also about a failure to investigate whether there is any state accountability in those cases—so, whether the risks to life were known and whether those deaths could have been prevented. That is critical to learning lessons, so that things change going forward.

The situation we have in all of those cases is that even though they are ECHR countries—they are countries where the convention applies—there has not yet been an investigation in any of those countries into whether the deaths were preventable. That is something that the Caruana Galizia family have been calling for for a very long time, since August 2018. It is something that has been supported at the highest level within the European Union and within the United Nations, although interestingly, not publicly by this Government. That is something that the family call for; they do call for support for their request for a public inquiry into whether Daphne's death could have been prevented.

What we saw in Jamal Khashoggi's case was that, clearly, Saudi Arabia was not going to conduct an investigation into what happened, and there were some question marks about the investigation that was taking place within Turkey. The situation there is that Agnes Callamard, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, stepped into the void and, on an ad hoc basis, created an investigation. The international community has no way of having a standing mechanism that investigates these cases, and it really does not seem to me good enough to have a situation where ultimately, in six or seven years' time, the Caruana Galizia family could be told in the European Court of Human Rights, "There should have been an investigation," by which time the evidence trail is cold.

A really practical recommendation is that there has to be some form of standing mechanism that can investigate these cases at the right time. There is a lady at the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom in Leipzig called Flutura Kusari, and a number of us are working with her on that issue, but I think that is a really concrete recommendation. There needs to be an investigation into the absence of a mechanism, because it is all very well for the European convention to say, "This family is entitled to an investigation," but it is not good enough to get a legal finding almost a decade later saying that right was breached. They need an investigation now. There is a fundamental gap in the mechanism where the law says one thing but there is no enforceability mechanism. That feeds impunity and means that we do not learn lessons and bereaved families do not get fundamental answers about what happened to their loved ones.



- Q7 Royston Smith:** If we cannot get an investigation and a review of some of those cases in places covered by the European convention on human rights, what hope does the UK have of influencing other countries around the world, which are probably far worse?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: That is a very good question, which is why I raised the example of Malta. Malta is a very small country in the European Union. We have great influence on Malta, so why has the Foreign Office not called for a public inquiry into the death of Daphne Caruana Galizia?

- Q8 Royston Smith:** That is a separate question. I appreciate that and you are right, but my point was that it is a big world and there is a lot of that going on. What hope can we have of influencing those other countries if we cannot even influence the likes of Malta?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: It depends on the efforts that are made to influence. The UK has in fact had great influence, and I really commend and thank the Foreign Office for much of the help that it has given us in many of our cases that have involved dual nationals in particular, for which it has been very influential, sometimes publicly and sometimes behind the scenes.

I think that at the moment, the focus is on non-Council of Europe and non-EU states, while there is silence on the countries that are closest to home, where we could have the most influence. The bigger concern for me is why the Foreign Office is not speaking about those cases.

The Myanmar example that I gave is a powerful one, because you see that the Foreign Office has had real influence. Predecessors to the current Foreign Secretary had not spoken out about that case. He has now done so, quite rightly.

- Q9 Conor McGinn:** To pick up on what you were saying about looking at Europe, in February of this year, the Council of Europe produced a report highlighting in great detail the chilling effect across Europe. It goes as far as to say that a culture of impunity has taken hold in many parts of Europe. It also talks about the fact that, in countries such as Hungary and Italy, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of media alerts. I have two questions on that. First, do you agree with the findings of that report, which says that press freedom in Europe is more fragile now than it has been at any time since the cold war? Secondly, how can prominent members of the Council of Europe, such as the UK, work to address the fact that 130 journalists in its member states are being detained, the majority of them in Turkey?

Professor Harrison: The report itself is chilling. It reflects some of the things that I said earlier about the way that journalism is perceived. When we look at impunity, it is of course about legal frameworks, but there is a politics of impunity that we have researched and talked about at the University of Sheffield. Journalists get cast into spaces of exception almost, where they are not protected by national laws or international laws—they are beyond their reach. Those things are terribly important



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because they make those journalists less accessible, less touchable and less able to talk about some things in public.

As Julie said, it is sometimes very hard to get to the heart of the issue. There has to be a concrete way of using the laws and influence that we have to look at what is happening to journalists and condemn it in the strongest possible way, in terms of the diminishment of civil societies. In the European context, that is much more possible, because we are talking about democratic states with vibrant civil societies. There are very pernicious and antagonistic areas of interaction developing through right-wing politics, partisan news media and echo chambers. When World Press Freedom Day were talking about the problems facing journalists around the world, it was very striking that countries that do not have a free press—they are partly free or at the bottom of the league—face the same sorts of issues that we now face in Europe.

In the European context, we can actually say that there are mechanisms there. There is the *acquis communautaire*, and there are things that we can use in the context of the EU. There are particular triggers and mechanisms that can be used. It is so important that it is called out for what it is in that context, because it is not the same in every world region. We cannot just look at our backyard and say, "Well, it's pretty okay, and most of those countries are in the 'free' part of the index." We have to call it out and condemn it where it is happening, possibly with even more strength and more political clout than when it is in a place where you can see that it is in a fragile state with all sorts of other difficulties, such as poor infrastructure and no rule of law that works to support journalists. It is very easy to go down a slippery slope and lose what we have got. That is possibly one of the most important things that can be done.

Julie Posetti: It is vital to critique the culture of impunity and the culture of denigration of journalism and journalists. It is not just western Europe; in the US, you have an environment where journalists are being declared to be "fake news", "the enemy of the state" or "the enemy of the people". This has two effects. First, it exposes the journalists in that state or country to increased physical and digital threats. I hope we can get to the enormous psychological impacts of online harassment, which have a very chilling effect on the capacity of journalists to do their job. They threaten to overflow into the physical realm and are causing women journalists around the world—multiple research publications have confirmed this—to withdraw from public activity. Critics and analysts who participate in public debate are withdrawing.

The secondary effect of the enabling culture is that journalists are seen as fair target for abuse and physical attack. We can go to the pipe bomb situation at CNN, which is a very recent example of this in an environment of tolerance and a history of empowerment of journalistic rights. When a state enables that kind of attack and assault on journalists—a state like the US, Malta and many other western countries, such as Hungary, Turkey and so on—the very worst impacts of that kind of behaviour are in states in, say, Africa or parts of Latin America, where ultimately the cost is more



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frequently the loss of a journalist's life or their imprisonment for prolonged periods. When it happens in another state that we are not critiquing—we being the West, the UK, and my home country, Australia—and we do not stand up to condemn that kind of licensing of the assault and abuse of journalists, we not only risk the journalists in those countries in the west, but dramatically increase the risk to journalists in the most vulnerable countries that we have been talking about. We need to acknowledge that.

- Q10 **Conor McGinn:** Two journalists have been arrested here in the UK in relation to a documentary that they made: Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey. Has that been noticed by the Council of Europe in terms of the wider global environment, and do you think it has had an impact on the UK's ability to show its moral repugnance at the curtailment of journalistic freedom in other parts of the world?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: The short answer is yes, it has been noticed. I am very conscious of the National Union of Journalists having raised concerns about this and saying, "Well, if the Foreign Office is quite rightly going to be dealing with this as a priority internationally, we have got to get our own house in order here." How do you explain what has happened with Trevor and Barry? I am very conscious of that, and it is quite right that it has been raised.

There is a related point as well, which goes a little wider. It would be very helpful for this Committee to consider asking the Minister and the Foreign Office how they are going to ensure that this priority is spread as a cross-Government priority. We often find that there is a fundamental mismatch between what is being said by the Foreign Office on a particular case and what is being said by other Departments, particularly the Home Office. A very obvious example is something that came up a number of weeks ago at the Committee to Protect Journalists. When they had an event in London, there was a speaker from BBC Persian who said, "Despite the Foreign Office recognising the risks that we are under, many of my colleagues were refused visas when our family members applied to come over." They are told, "There is no reason why your family member has to come." If this is a top priority for the Foreign Office, it must be a cross-Government top priority. It is quite right that people are raising questions about the Trevor and Barry case, and about visa policy by the Home Office. That is a trend that we see quite often in our cases, namely that there is a mismatch between the Foreign Office being very supportive and another Government Department, most notably the Home Office, not singing from the same hymn sheet.

- Q11 **Catherine West:** Briefly, I wanted to praise the Committee staff for finding four women witnesses, because often we have an all-male panel. However, I also wanted to ask about the total number of journalists in the world, and the proportion of those who are women, and the proportion of those who have been killed tragically, like Marie Colvin or others, and just your reflections on what needs to be done, because it is a specific sort of attack on a woman.

In Amnesty's recent report on attacks on Twitter, we know from women



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colleagues in the House of Commons that some of them get targeted much more than others. I just wanted a quick comment from you about that.

Julie Posetti: I will start with the online harassment scourge, and then perhaps Jackie can talk about the ways in which women are particularly targeted in the field.

It is a combination of physical and sexual harassment IRL—in real life— or the real world, where women are working either in their new organisations or in the field. But what I specialise in and where I have seen some really devastating effects is in the exposure of women journalists to increasingly venal gendered attacks online.

Women journalists are targeted specifically because they are perceived to be more vulnerable to the kinds of threats of sexual violence, for example. Much as we see in the context of war zones, rape is a weapon of war. In the context of digital harassment, the threat to do sexual harm and violence is to you as an individual, to your daughters specifically— frequently, that is a threat—and to your mother. So there is this pattern of gendered abuse that leaves women journalists who are targeted feeling exposed and vulnerable.

It is not just the hideous name-calling and the threats, which news organisations must take seriously but takes away from their capacity to do journalism because they are tied up in dealing with all manner of networked assaults on their journalists; women are also targeted as a result of orchestrated, often state-sponsored, disinformation campaigns. I can say from my research, which is for both UNESCO and the Reuters Institute, that we are seeing a very evident pattern, where, at the intersection of disinformation and particularly state-based orchestrated disinformation campaigns and gendered online harassment, stand women journalists, who are targeted specifically to chill their public participation, and their reporting and their journalism. It is a huge problem.

In fact, I was with Jackie on World Press Freedom Day in Ethiopia last week. I sat on a panel and then participated in a lab on online harassment, and one of the experiences that was frightening but also strangely empowering was that there were women from Africa, Latin America and all around the world seated around that table who came up to me and a couple of other Western journalists and said, "It's actually a relief to hear that you are going through exactly what we are going through." And when we looked at the notes that had been taken, it was threats, it was fear, it was, "I don't want to go work. I am quitting my job." This stuff is real and has a really devastating potential to impact on the work of independent journalism.

In the case of the Philippines, there is now the very famous case of Maria Ressa, a South African journalist trying to use the law to push back against the manipulation and the weaponisation of social media targeting women journalists specifically in the context of an election. In an election context, we also see that the closer you get to the election, the worse



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these attacks become, so there are implications for democracy that are quite significant.

- Q12 **Chair:** Are there states that are particularly bad? Which are the worst state actors?

Julie Posetti: India, the Philippines, South Africa, and places like Mexico as well. Brazil is an emerging and very serious—

- Q13 **Chair:** Could you be a bit more precise? Those are states in which there is particular targeting and particular violence. Are there any in which the state itself is a particularly bad actor?

Julie Posetti: Those states.

- Q14 **Chair:** Oh, those states—okay.

Julie Posetti: I have this handbook here, which is the Vietnamese copy, which is the only one I could find, but published by UNESCO. It demonstrates case studies in each of those countries, although we had not yet got to Brazil. This is proliferating. As one state successfully practises this kind of disinformation campaign, often it is caught up with mistruths—deliberate attempts to mislead journalists; to befuddle them; to cause confusion. Disinformation about the journalists is a feature of these attacks, so it will go to undermine their credibility. It will make the deepfake videos, presenting these women as porn stars, for example. In a country like India—particularly a Muslim journalist, Rana Ayyub, who was targeted in that context—the risks are enormous; but those are the states.

There are certainly examples of the Finnish journalist, which we might get to, Jessikka Aro, who was targeted, she believes—and she has sought to establish this through legal mechanisms—by Russian troll farms. So this is a geopolitical problem, and I think it is something that the UK could potentially take leadership on, in terms of raising awareness and building capacity, to echo what Jackie has said, which is vitally important. That goes to training, research, engagement with judicial actors, with law enforcement, but also with news organisations and media development organisations. I think that intersection between development and media freedom is fundamentally important.

- Q15 **Chair:** It is interesting that you mention not just the way individual states may be using these, but the way there may be cross-border co-operation using, for example, Russian troll farms.

Julie Posetti: Yes, indeed. The outsourcing of harassment, if you like.

- Q16 **Chris Bryant:** But in Russia you also get the murder of journalists, in significant numbers, from Anna Politkovskaya onwards. There still has not been any prosecution, has there?

Professor Harrison: Not of the mastermind, anyway—the person behind it.

Chris Bryant: Well, he's in the Kremlin.



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Professor Harrison: Following on from that, just to echo what Julie said, obviously countries that have great levels of freedom of expression and have a free press are also precisely the places where attacks on women online are very prevalent—so again, just to reiterate, this is not a problem for countries where there is no free press. We get that sort of harassment. Women are double targets; that is really acknowledged everywhere. I don't have the figures, but I can certainly find them out, in terms of percentages and proportions of women who have been attacked, if that is useful. Media literacy in schools—education—is also part of that trickle-down approach to building capacity. It is the people who send these things as well, whether they are political actors or doing it for a prank or doing it out of hatred, or whatever it is—women journalists need to be recognised as people with rights. That comes through education; so again it is about sustainability and capacity in states.

Women in newsrooms—if we are going offline and talking about just their lot as women—are quite often unlikely to complain anyway. That is one of the greatest problems—that women don't tend to officially complain about harassment or threats. That is partly because they don't think they will necessarily be taken seriously, or protected, but also partly because they think if they do complain they won't get sent out on stories and somehow they will be marginalised and finish up covering stories that are not of high value. So the infrastructure in many places is not there to protect women in their role.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: Just a few quick points: it is a really important question. I am conscious of an all-male panel being called a “manel”. I am not sure what we would be called as an all-female panel.

Catherine West: A “gynanel”?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: Of course.

I agree entirely with what has been said and I am grateful that Jackie is going to give you the numbers that you asked for. I think it is also important, as well as the pure numbers, to look at some of the features. So in some conflict environments in particular, women are often bloggers and freelancers, and are less likely to have the structured support. That is particularly the case in countries which have poor women's rights protection mechanisms. So you see people like Zaina Erhaim. You see people who are bloggers who, because of the power of social media, if they have access to Twitter or Facebook, can through some of those new forms of media become quite influential bloggers, commenting in environments which are very risky environments. So as well as the numbers I think it would be worth us speaking and giving you some more information about some of the features of women journalists.

Secondly, I agree with what Jackie said about this being a problem in countries with a free press as well as elsewhere. It mirrors some of the gendered attacks on women MPs, women human rights defenders and so on. A good example of that within a European country is Malta. I don't think, from the evidence I have seen, that you have this example, but I



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think it would be helpful. There has been some very problematic, offensive, misogynistic material circulating on Facebook groups, including Facebook groups of which very high-level politicians in Malta are members. It has a photo of Daphne Caruana Galizia, a photograph of Caroline Muscat, who runs *The Shift News* now, with lines underneath it saying something like, "One witch is dead." There are misogynistic attacks on a woman journalist now using the death of a woman journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, to fuel them.

Thirdly, in some particular states that I am working in, some of the gendered attacks online are cross-border. That is why the BBC Persian example is such an important one, because many of those journalists are here; many of them are probably your constituents. They are based here, they are dual UK-Iranian nationals, and many of them are targeted for being women. Many of them have false stories circulating about their sexuality, suggesting they are homosexual or lesbian. Whether they are or not is irrelevant; many of them do not want to correct that, because they see it as suggesting there is something wrong with it, but these rumours are circulated to try to undermine them and their credibility with the audience.

That is being taken very seriously by David Kaye, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression. We are in the process of making a complaint about gendered attacks by Iran online, and we can certainly provide the Committee with that material and with some of the material from David Kaye, who did a report on this topic last year that it may be helpful for the Committee to see.

Chair: That would be great.

Q17 **Andrew Rosindell:** It was said earlier by Julie that there is potential for UK leadership in this area. I am interested to hear from all of you how that should manifest itself. Clearly, the UK has a proud history of standing up for freedom and liberties and the rule of law, yet it seems that in this field, all those principles are being broken down, even by countries we thought also believed in democracy and the right to free speech. How do you feel the UK needs to take leadership in this area? Do you feel more funding is needed for training? Do you feel that our embassies and high commissions should be playing a greater role in this, or other institutions? Should this be something that DFID should take on board and play a part in, because freedom of speech is part of good governance? This whole debate we are having today is very useful, very interesting and very enlightening, but where does it lead to? What should Britain do to take this forward?

Julie Posetti: Do you want me to start?

Andrew Rosindell: I would like to hear from all four of you, but you start, Julie, because you mentioned the words "UK leadership", which is what made me think this is what we need to do.

Julie Posetti: Yes. I think it is all the things you said. It has to be intersectional. We have mentioned capacity building, and there is an



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important role for DFID in terms of both its international and its in-country work. This is not just a funding plea per se, but there needs to be tailored funding that targets the skill development of journalists, defensive tactics for dealing with anything from gendered online harassment to digital-era threats such as surveillance. There needs to be training that is physical and face to face wherever possible, enhanced with any other kind of training and resources that can be developed, and that comes from a framework of understanding that defends media freedom.

There needs to be support for investment directly in journalism education; we are not just talking about training of journalists who are already in the field, but an investment in journalism education, specifically to look at these defensive strategies and the international rights that could apply to the journalists in situ. In Ethiopia, I was approached by at least half a dozen very recently empowered journalism educators, who came to me asking for help. "We don't know how to deal with disinformation. We don't even have digital-era skills for storytelling," they are saying to me, thinking that because I am at the Reuters Institute I must be able to provide that. Those are two very practical ways through, say, BBC Media Action or the empowerment of the BBC World Service, to add value there, and other NGOs that work in those spaces.

One word, collaboration, is very important. That goes internationally, with cross-border collaboration. The Swedes, the Danes and the Dutch are doing amazing work in these spaces. There is an opportunity to augment that, but there is also an opportunity to take real leadership in those spaces of training and development.

To underline some other things I have said around enabling, let us take a country such as Ethiopia, where there is a new Prime Minister who has specifically said— Jeremy Hunt was delivering one of the keynote addresses stating how important this opportunity is. To take that opportunity, you need to put the funding behind it, and to put the research behind the funding to ensure that what is being delivered is robust. That needs to be done extremely quickly.

Professor Harrison: I agree with everything you say, so I will not repeat any of those things. I would say that one area that is ripe for development and funding is the SDG 16.10 agenda—"Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms"—and the two monitoring instruments, including 16.10.1, which requires better ways of collecting data, and making it more robust and systematic. We are doing some research on that at the moment, and we have done a gaps analysis. We know that it is patchy. If you are going to hold anyone to account, you need robust, systematic data that is comparable across the world.

Also, countries quite often do not keep great records, so you could invest in record-keeping, so that we do have the data. Data is evidence, and if we can gather enough evidence— We can do that as an academic community. We can support some of those mechanisms to collect more robust data, which then allows you to do something concrete; it allows you to say something very specific.



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We have a journalism safety research network of 180 different organisations and universities around the world. We are a capacity—academics can bring capacity—of in-depth research and knowledge in different places. Approach us. Use us. We want to research and find things out. We want to do that, and we are doing it successfully in the context of the UNESCO action plan. We have quite a long history of getting involved in various aspects of the implementation of that through research, so we can build up academic search capacity very easily.

Of course, that will require—I would say this—funding and commitment, but we would be able to look at everything across the board in a much more in-depth, systematic and holistic way and to support different actors in this multi-stakeholder community that is trying, across the board, to improve the safety of journalists and media freedom. That is how I would say that you can really practically contribute to the global media freedom environment at the moment.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I greatly welcome the FCO's indicating that this is a priority. That in itself, as a matter of principle, is something that we should praise. It is clear from the FCO's submission that it has very laudable aims when it talks about its vision being to be able to reduce the intimidation, harassment and persecution of journalists across the world. I suspect that, for those of us on the panel and for the Committee, a key issue is how best to be able to do that, and how that can be measured. What are the tangible aims and the metrics or indices that will show whether they have been successful? Six months on from the razzmatazz of the July event, how do you see whether or not that has been achieved or is on the way to being achieved?

I would suggest a few key things. First, I think it is quite right that the FCO, in paragraph 5.9 of its submission, talked about the importance of using key points in the calendar. It talked about, in very general terms, potentially having some commitments that it will call on people to sign up to at the July event or on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, for example. That is quite right. While the eyes of the world are on the UK and Canada on 10 and 11 July, and while you have—I hope; I understand that the invitations have not gone out yet—a very high number of individuals in the room who are key decision makers in many countries that we want to influence, that is the time to call upon them to sign up to certain key pledges.

One obvious pledge, which I know has been supported by my colleague Amal Clooney, is a transparency pledge. When there is a trial of a journalist or media organisation, that should be open; there should be open justice in those cases. That in itself can be hugely helpful. Sunlight can be a very effective disinfectant. That is something on which there could be an ask at that event. If countries are present and do not sign up to it, that in itself could be picked up by journalists and commented on. That in itself would give an incentive to people to comply.

I also think the proposal for a mechanism in relation to investigating deaths of journalists and learning lessons promptly, which we have

referred to, is an obvious thing that you could ask people to sign up to. We can give you more detail on that proposal. Those key dates are important to call on states publicly to sign up and comply, but that only goes so far.

The second issue is leadership on issues close to home. I have mentioned the importance of the UK being seen to speak out on key issues where a UK national is affected or it is a country with whom it has influence, such as Myanmar and Malta. I should mention that Jeremy Bliss is here; his cousin, Christopher Allen, was killed in August 2017. He was a dual US-UK national. I suspect many of you in the Committee did not know about his case until you knew that he was coming. That shows a real problem. This was a UK national who was killed in South Sudan. I spoke to Jeremy and his parents yesterday; his parents do not have answers to the most basic questions about what happened in his case: how many people were killed with him, if it was an ambush and if he was targeted deliberately. They simply do not know. It is unacceptable that almost two years later, they are left without answers to those most basic of questions. This is a UK national who was affected. The Foreign Office has been involved in his case at a low level for a very long time. That is a real example.

If we are to show real leadership, it cannot be just on a case like Maria Ressa or journalists in Mexico; it has to be leadership on UK nationals who are affected, and European Union and Council of Europe countries that are affected. My concern is that there is some radio silence on some of those issues closer to home, but a lot more shouting about issues further away.

On the third point on funding, I entirely agree about capacity building. It is important to look at the superb work on freelancers by people like the Rory Peck Trust. Often, there is a particular funding gap for those journalists. I think it is excellent that we have a legal panel scrutinising legislation, but one of the key issues for many of my clients is that they have been left in a circumstance where local lawyers cannot represent them effectively because they are under huge pressure. We saw that in Egypt, where local lawyers get accused of being connected to the Muslim Brotherhood if they even act for al-Jazeera journalists or other journalists who are accused of terrorism offences. I think that the FCO could give some thought to having the equivalent of the panel that it has on public international law, and a panel of individuals who could act for the individual journalists who are left without legal support, who could make submissions to the UN and give them advice. That is a very practical example. At the moment, those cases come to us in a range of ways, but I am sure many people are not represented but need representation.

Q18 Stephen Gethins: This is a brief follow-up on the case of Mr Allen, and your criticism of the FCO's lack of knowledge. Why do you think that is? Is it capacity on the ground, or the fact that the person was a dual national and therefore expected the State Department to pick it up? What was the problem?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: We can give you more detailed submissions on that in writing. I am quite conscious that I have instructions and I will need to check precisely what I say.



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To give you a brief headline answer, I think it is quite right that the UK appears to have weighed in on that case behind the US and has assumed that the State Department will do a lot of the running, but one of the particular difficulties is that there is an entitlement for a bereaved family under section 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009—a piece of domestic legislation—that if a body from abroad returns to the UK, they are automatically entitled to have an inquest once the coroner is informed.

This family would have very much liked to avail themselves of that, but they did not know about it. Christopher's body went via Heathrow in international transit, so no coroner in London was informed that he was here. His body then went to San Diego. They are in a position where, due to a technicality and a lack of knowledge at the time about their entitlements, they have not had an inquest. There is plainly no investigation taking place in South Sudan, for a range of reasons that this Committee will well understand. But they were very close to having an investigation in the UK, in the same way you would have if a British national died in custody in Spain and their body was returned here. There is a real issue about whether the family should have an investigation here into what happened in circumstances where there is no accountability or investigation in Sudan.

In terms of why this happened, I think a large part of it seems to be because he was a dual US-UK national. It appears that it fell between multiple stools. There was also some UN involvement on the ground, and at the time there was a practical issue about the difficulty of getting his body out. I think all eyes were on getting his body out and getting it to a place where his family could accept it and grieve. It is only later that it has become apparent that they are not getting answers from the Sudanese authorities. They need answers and an investigation.

Q19 Ann Clwyd: I apologise that I had to leave earlier to make an argument in another Committee for a debate on international humanitarian law. I will catch up with the evidence that you gave later. I want to ask you about Turkey. You may have already mentioned this, but a number of journalists are in prison there, many of whom I met before they went to prison, so I know how afraid journalists are to do their job in Turkey. Given that there is going to be a new election in Istanbul by order of President Erdoğan, and given how difficult it will be for journalists there to report on the comings and goings in the new election, how do you think we can help journalists? We have some influence in Turkey, so how do you think we can help journalists in that country to practise their profession?

Professor Harrison: I think it is a very difficult one. In Turkey, it has gone from journalism and journalists being repressed to journalism being totally oppressed. Journalists are in a completely different space from where they were before the coup. It is the biggest jail. Again, it is about public and private condemnation of the situation. The world for journalists in Turkey has changed an awful lot. It has not stayed the same; it is getting worse and worse, and that is not acceptable. That is the main message. We can show that—we can evidence it. We have just done some



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interviews with journalists in Turkey. We can't identify their news organisations, who they are, whether they are male or female, or which part of the country they come from. That speaks to the fear that has grown exponentially over the last few years. It is about public condemnation in the strongest terms.

- Q20 **Chris Bryant:** I get the impression from talking to others in Europe that Germany does this far better than we do. It does training programmes for journalists in Turkey, and therefore gives them international renown and support. We don't do any of that.

Professor Harrison: I think the UK is pretty silent about Turkey. It comes back to some of the things that we have already said about Malta, Turkey and places a bit closer to home. It would be fantastic if there was more pressure placed and more condemnation.

Julie Posetti: At the Reuters Institute, for example, I have had requests from Turkish journalists who would love to come and be a journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute through the Thomson Reuters Foundation, which also does brilliant work in the development of journalism internationally, but there is such a chilling effect that even putting your hand up for one of these fellowships exposes you to long-term risk. We have a responsibility to enable the withdrawal of these journalists—to provide refuge for them.

One of the great benefits of digital media—we haven't talked much about this—is the capacity to do great journalism remotely. Perhaps there are opportunities that you might want to investigate, being cognisant of the risks to those journalists if they must go back to Turkey. You should enable them to come. I know you are doing some of that with the Chevening fellowships that have been announced. It is about enabling more of that kind of collaboration and co-operation between Turkish journalists and journalists from this country, for example. It is a chance to provide both refuge and an opportunity for reflection at an institute like the Reuters Institute. There are several others.

You should ensure that, in your attempts to represent this to your constituents—your publics—you go beyond reiterating what we are saying here and try to find ways to explain why this is important to you, sitting in village X. Why is journalism valuable to us? Why is it essential to our way of life? Even as journalists, we struggle to report on these things, but we have to find powerful ways of explaining to people that if they do not have access to reliable, quality information that they can trust, which puts a spotlight—uncomfortably sometimes—on people like you, their lives ultimately will be worse off. The stories about journalists in Turkey and in other parts of the world where oppression is extreme sometimes wash over people in the way that stories of famine and disaster wash over audiences, but we have to find ways powerfully to describe the ultimate value of independent journalism and the life-risking moves of journalists.

- Q21 **Chair:** You made the point yourself when you spoke about the cross-border abuse and troll farms—well, we are seeing that in the UK. The idea that media freedom, or the lack of media freedom, in Russia in any



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way makes us more free is clearly complete rubbish; it puts us more at risk, as we are seeing the tyrannical abuses of the Russian state used against the liberties that the British people traditionally thought that they could enjoy with impunity. It turns out that we cannot, that we are just as affected by the abuses of tyrannical regimes, whether they are in Russia or any of the other countries that you mentioned—the abuses come straight back here to the UK.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I agree very much with what has been said. On the point about remote journalism, there are many examples of superb remote journalism—BBC Persian is a very good example, or Deutsche Welle’s Iranian reporting, by journalists in exile essentially, who have been unable to return to Tehran or elsewhere in Iran since the elections a decade ago. So there are examples of people doing superb cutting-edge reporting from a distance.

Two practical things on Turkey. First—this is an example where I am not criticising the UK but where the UK could show leadership in the Council of Europe—there is a real concern that with many of those Turkish cases the European Court of Human Rights has been so unwilling to use its mechanisms to protect journalists or indeed others who have been targeted, like academics, at an earlier stage. Many of us who work in the field question the exhaustion of domestic remedies and mechanisms—the requirement is that you must go through all the hoops in Turkey before, ultimately, you can go to the European Court of Human Rights, but that is in circumstances where there are real questions about the rule of law in Turkey.

Q22 Chair: Is there almost a reticence in Western countries to push what we see as values-based policies, as though the values of freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of assembly are in some way Western values rather than just human values?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I don’t think that is the particular issue here. Here, many of the organisations that have been supporting some of those journalists, like Reporters Without Borders or PEN, and many of the individual, very brave lawyers who are working for those journalists within Turkey, have found that when they contact the European Court of Human Rights to say, “Might we be able to apply for some form of interim protection?”, they are told, “You’re way off. You have to go through all the hoops in the Turkish courts before you can come here.” There is a real issue about that—not just with Turkey but with Russia and many Council of Europe states where there is some work to be done on strengthening the interim mechanisms and dealing with the exhaustion of domestic remedies bat-off, which often means that cases have to spend years trawling through courts domestically in Council of Europe states that simply do not respect their position.

Secondly, one of the particularly pernicious aspects of what is happening in Turkey is the targeting of journalists’ families. Many of you will know about the case of Can Dündar, for example, and other Turkish journalists here in exile. They have family members who remain in Turkey, or they



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have property in Turkey, and essentially they are told, “We are holding your family member or property hostage and the result, if you don’t return to face trial, will be that your family member will be homeless.” That is where this cross-governmental issue is so important, because that is precisely the kind of situation in which we have got to ensure that the Home Office is married up with the Foreign Office on visa issues—when family members apply for issues—and I’m afraid I am aware of quite a few cases in which family members have been refused visas in circumstances where the Foreign Office has quite rightly recognised that the journalist in exile here is at risk. That mirrors the situation in relation to BBC Persian, which I referred to earlier, and all the more reason why we must ensure that this is a cross-governmental priority and not just a Foreign Office-only focus.

Q23 Chair: Otherwise, effectively, you are forcing the journalist home to see their family.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: Yes. That was the same for a number of dual UK-Turkish nationals who are academics and signed a petition criticising some issues to do with lack of academic freedom in Turkey. The result was that they were in effect told, “Unless you return for your first court appearance in Turkey, the result will be a warrant out for your arrest and implications for your family members within Turkey, and you won’t be able to see your family members again.” So they are kind of starved out, and they are in a position where they have to return, despite that being extremely risky. That is not a situation that we should put up with for UK-Turkish nationals who are here, which should be a place of refuge. We should protect them and prevent them from having to return in that way.

Ann Clwyd: The Inter-Parliamentary Union deals with the human rights of parliamentarians. The committee that I sit on in Geneva, which meets several times a year, looks at the human rights of politicians. They get the countries concerned to come before the committee and answer questions. There should be something similar for journalists, I think, because it is quite effective in the case of politicians. I have been to Turkey on two occasions to visit MPs in jail. We have managed to get them out of jail. The pressure that that sort of organisation can put on a country such as Turkey, as far as politicians are concerned, is considerable, so there should be something similar for journalists.

Q24 Priti Patel: Turkey obviously has a significant bilateral relationship with the United Kingdom. Are any of you aware of any bilateral representations that have been made on specific cases, such as on visas of journalists or protections and rights? I appreciate that most of the discussion today has been focused on institutions, whether that is the UN, UNESCO or the Council of Europe, but do you think that there is more scope for pressing those issues at a bilateral level? Do you see other countries acting in that sphere too?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: The short answer is—I am just thinking—that I cannot give a huge amount of detail, but I can see if I can take instructions to give you more information. I am aware of some bilateral



submissions being made in some individual cases—effectively, in a number of cases—but it is a little patchy in my experience. I am a little unclear about why that is. I will see if I can give you some more information but I will have to take instructions from some of my clients.

I certainly think there is scope for pressing more. I entirely agree with what Jackie said earlier about the need to condemn in the strongest terms a crackdown on anyone perceived as being an opponent of the regime in Turkey, which extends not just to journalists but to academics and civil society more generally. The UK could be saying more publicly. Certainly, privately, behind the scenes, in some individual cases, the Foreign Office has been extremely helpful.

Q25 Chair: Can I come on to two other videos that we have received from the IPI? Joan Chirwa, talking about Zambia, and Daoud Kuttub, talking about the middle east, raised a further problem that you have touched on, Ms Posetti, which is that a lot of the media is owned by politicians, wealthy individuals and other vested interests, which can effectively cause a form of censorship—simply not running stories that would otherwise be critical of them. What can the UK do to support independent ownership? We are going to come on to the BBC in a moment, so perhaps hold off on any answers about that.

Julie Posetti: There are a number of ways that you could consider intervening. One of the first I would suggest is support for collaborative investigative journalism. There are various international organisations, such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, that are cross-border—you will probably remember the Panama Papers story most prominently of what they have done.

There are similar organisations based in regions around the world that enable collaborative reporting between journalists across borders, which goes beyond publications. That is certainly true in the case of Malta. The Panama Papers clearly featured reporting that was coming out of Malta as part of that collaboration.

You can enable skills development through that kind of investment, and enable a degree of shielding of the individual journalists in the countries where it is most difficult to do that kind of independent reporting, through that kind of network approach, if you like. You are developing skills and potentially increasing the protective network that that journalist is a member of.

I am not suggesting that you go in and start funding British or UK Government-funded media outlets in those countries. I do not know if you are aware that there is certainly a story, by way of a sidebar today, involving the Hungarian Government reaching into the UK and establishing a news organisation here—you will have to check *The Guardian*—by way of application by a diplomat based with the Hungarian embassy here.

What is happening in that case is a reverse of this situation. They have established a news organisation—an online publication—and funded it. It

focuses almost exclusively on migration and asylum-seeker type issues. It was a way of pushing far right political agendas. This is a geo-political reality.

I come back to what I mentioned before: the capacity to do soft diplomacy through specifically funding projects such as the BBC World Service, and thinking of creating new ways to enable the kind of journalism that the BBC World Service has traditionally done, as well as BBC Media Action in partnership with the World Service. It is not an exclusive club. It is not that the BBC is the only organisation capable of doing this. But that kind of work can be very valuable in strengthening a response within countries where it is just impossible to get stories of a critical nature published.

Q26 Stephen Gethins: Ms Posetti, on that issue—I would be grateful for the view of other panellists as well—BBC bureaux and the World Service have that outreach across the world, but can you expand on that? To what extent is it good for supporting local journalism, and to what extent does it squeeze it out? I was really interested, because enhancing local journalism is something that is incredibly important to us, but also worldwide.

Julie Posetti: For the journalists whom we have hosted at the Reuters Institute over the past year—I won't name them or identify specific countries—the work that the BBC World Service does, and some of the projects from BBC Media Action and the Thomson Reuters foundation, have been highlighted as being valuable in a range of ways.

With the World Service, it is partly about modelling independent quality journalism. In many countries, there is not necessarily an established local model, or that model has been so weakened and disempowered that the training of journalists to develop the skills, to do this kind of accountability reporting, which strengthens governance, is absent. So it's a modelling process. I think it could go further, for example by figuring out ways to enable the BBC to be more nimble in these environments where they can collaborate with other news organisations. To have local news media partners, for example, you have to be quite careful about which you choose.

But we need to develop this form of journalism. If it can come through hands-off funding, to support the development of independent journalism in those contexts, I think that would be extremely valuable. It works in two ways: as a way of providing credible, quality information to an audience, and to model behaviours connected to robust independent reporting for other journalists.

I understand your question—it is a good one—around whether it squeezes out other players, but in my experience it is generally effective more than anything else. I have seen it being eroded in Australia and the UK, frankly, and budget lines being removed. As a response to this global disinformation crisis, I think we are now seeing a return to reinvesting appropriately in these processes.



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Olga Robinson: I haven't had a chance to introduce myself. My name is Olga Robinson and I am a senior journalist with BBC Monitoring's disinformation team. I specialise in Russia, because I am Russian. I have worked for most of my life in Russia, as a monitoring journalist who specialises in the Russian media environment.

When I was in Russia, I witnessed at first hand how the 2020 programme, which allowed some additional funding from the Government to the World Service, including BBC Russian, enabled journalists working for BBC Russian to build their profile in Russia as a source of information—a reliable, trustworthy, balanced, impartial and independent source of information.

When I joined the BBC six years ago, BBC Russian was rarely cited by the Russian media, but I just recently checked some available stats on its performance, provided by a Russian media analytics company. The stats were impressive, in my personal opinion, because BBC Russian was the eighth-most cited media on social media in Russia, which was quite good, and it was No. 20 in the number of citings in the Russian media, which was not the case when I joined. Among the very few remaining independent Russian pundits and analysts, the BBC Russian newsroom at the moment is seen as one of the best, if not the best, in Russia—it's valuable—and some of the journalism counters and challenges the narratives on, say, the Skripals and the Russian interference in the US. Some of that fascinating work is translated into English. I think those facts speak for themselves.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: May I make a really quick point on law? Sorry; that is never the most attractive start to a sentence. Some of the larger organisations, including the BBC World Service, have shown real leadership in some countries on legal issues; that benefits much smaller organisations, who don't have pockets that are as deep and could never deal with those points. To give two examples, al-Jazeera has brought a challenge against Egypt in relation to investment treaty arbitration, on the basis that it invested in Egypt on the assumption that Egypt complied with international human rights standards—it's signed up to the universal declaration and it's got a constitution that says that it respects freedom of expression—but in fact its investment was a flawed one, because Egypt doesn't, in fact, comply with that. That is quite important.

The work that the BBC World Service has done on Iran, which was supported very well by the Foreign Office, has also been groundbreaking. Highlighting the cross-border nature of the harassment of BBC Persian journalists, like Kasra Naji, who is sitting behind me, has been helpful for Deutsche Welle, which is a much smaller operation that is also affected, and other smaller operators like Radio Farda. Others who are also experiencing that cross-border harassment, but who wouldn't have had the resources and who weren't able to take leadership on this issue, are greatly benefitting from the fact that the World Service has done that work. That's my legal point; I hope I will be forgiven for raising it.



Professor Harrison: A general point: the BBC has also given support by working with local journalists on big stories, such as Ghanaian corruption. Again, it has influence in terms of facilitating investigative journalism that may or may not have happened in particular contexts.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: On that issue, what I find in much of my work—my colleague Jonathan Price, who is sitting behind me, is working on a case in Kenya at the moment that is being fought by the BBC; many local organisations wouldn't have been able to do that—is that often the chilling effect comes just from the legal threat. An organisation gets a threat, and they just take the story down and they can't fight the threat. It is critically important that organisations like the BBC or like al-Jazeera do fight it; that benefits everyone.

Q27 **Stephen Gethins:** Obviously, the BBC is partly state-funded. There are channels, such as RT and Press TV, who would like to compare themselves to the BBC and who would argue that they offer a greater diversity of views. What distinguishes these channels from the BBC? I would be really interested in what any of you have to say about that. Ms Robinson, you are probably best placed.

Olga Robinson: I have been monitoring Russia Today and Sputnik on a daily basis for years, and the difference between Russia Today—or RT, as it is now known—and the BBC is that the BBC is editorially independent from the Government or market. In a 2012 interview to Russian media, Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief, said that RT see themselves as the equivalent of a defence ministry—some kind of entity that is there to protect Russian interests—and that in the case of a conflict, they can step up and be something akin to a defence ministry. She said that at that point in time, we were not waging any wars with anyone, but that the defence ministry is always there, prepared for war, and so should we be. That kind of line and attitude is what sets the BBC apart from Russia Today, although I know that RT editors and journalists often say that we are no different.

Julie Posetti: As a media scholar, I have been at events where a quite prominent South African working for Russia Today, who is the Middle East correspondent, will stand up, often flanked by Russians who are travelling with her, and make the argument that this is an independent service; it just happens to have the Kremlin perspective. I would agree with what Olga has suggested—that the distinction is editorial independence at the BBC.

Certainly, the BBC World Service and Radio Australia, from my homeland, have reputations as offering UK perspective on issues, but that is different from a Downing Street perspective on issues. That is the point that needs to be made.

Olga Robinson: Yes, exactly; I agree with that. Very often, Russian state media and some of the officials point out that the BBC is there to promote the UK and its values and culture. What they don't notice is that in the public purpose of the BBC, there is a continuation of that line, which says



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that the BBC is there to provide high-quality content that is based on the values of accuracy, fairness and impartiality. That is normally just ignored or not said, but it is essentially key.

- Q28 **Stephen Gethins:** And you don't think the fact that the Foreign Secretary has a role in the strategic decision making has an impact on perceptions elsewhere in the world?

Julie Posetti: Other than in debates with RT journalists, I have not heard that specifically said. I will say, though, that public broadcasting needs to be understood and identified as quite distinct from state broadcasting. What we have here is public broadcasting. One of the things the Committee could perhaps do in response to reinforcing the distinctions is very much ensure that point in public discourse. The BBC, like other public broadcasters around the world, is frequently used as some kind of political pawn, in my observation, where it might be perceived to have a particular political alignment. Given my observations and expertise, I think that is an unfair judgment.

We should probably recommend to you that there be an understanding of those distinctions between state and public broadcaster, and a decision to embrace the robust critique that the BBC and other public broadcasters are sometimes criticised over, because it is that which distinguishes the BBC from propagandistic networks such as RT. That comes with our maturity as a state.

Professor Harrison: I think it is the kind of viewer that the different organisations speak to, or even foster. For example, I believe the BBC is very much trying to foster citizenship and civil interlocutors; it does not want us to be consumers or partisans. In other words, the whole rationale of that is quite different, and is a creation of a different sort of civil or public capacity to interrogate and hold politicians and power to account. It is definitely there to give us the tools; that is its public purpose, which is different from supporting a particular regime. In fact, it is massively different; it is the opposite.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I agree with what has been said by Olga, Julie and Jackie. This is an unusual panel: we are all agreeing with each other. I have three quick additional supplementary points. The first is that I very much agree with Julie's suggestion that this Committee correct any misperception on this point. I find—and BBC Persian is a good example of this—that the connection is sometimes used as a stick to beat journalists with.

Quite rightly, that was criticised and condemned by the BBC World Service and by us as their lawyers and by others, including the Foreign Office, last year when Iran tried to say in March 2018 that the BBC Persian service is simply an arm of the intelligence services. Those of you who are members of Government and have been at the receiving end of criticism from the BBC would be surprised to hear the BBC being described as an arm of Government. Whether that is a misperception or a phrase used wrongly, it



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is certainly a concept that needs to be stamped out; it needs to be corrected.

Secondly, we need to be quite careful. We are dealing with apples and pears when we look first at Press TV, *Al-Mizan* newspaper and RT and then at state broadcasters who are represented by the European Broadcasting Union, including the BBC World Service. They are wholly different, for the range of reasons that Julie and Jackie have given, and it is quite important that we make that distinction very clear.

Thirdly, on editorial independence, I am conscious that people have referred to the World Service's editorial independence and to that being at the forefront of its work. It is important to remember that it is a public corporation. The way it is governed and funded is obviously set out by royal charter, and the charter itself stipulates the provision of the World Service and guarantees its editorial independence as well as its editorial guidelines. Of course, with the W2020 funding there was a guarantee from Government that funding was provided without strings attached. Editorial independence was guaranteed. So we are in wholly different territory from a Russia Today, *Al-Mizan*, Press TV scenario. We should make that very clear.

- Q29 **Catherine West:** In the case of the rare good news about the two journalists who reported on the Rohingya, do you feel the BBC played a role? It has been widely reported on the BBC, and there is that strong relationship that goes back a long way. What were the key elements that worked in Myanmar to get that good outcome? That is what we would like in Turkey and in other places.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: My colleague Amal Clooney acts for Reuters and for the journalists. I am not sure if you have seen her quote today, welcoming the outcome. She quite rightly paid tribute to the work that Reuters had done. Reuters have been superb in this case. It is a real model for other media organisations if something like this happens to their journalists. They have had it at the top of their agenda. They put money into it. They had a widespread campaign, they got a legal team on board and they have put pressure at every possible level. They have done a superb job. A similar job was done by *The Washington Post* in relation to Jason Rezaian, for example, where people put their column space where their mouth was and ensured that it was prioritised and a focus was given to the case. That certainly made a difference.

I obviously think that having Amal acting for them and doing the work that she has done has been hugely helpful. Reuters' work has been very helpful. I do think the international pressure brought to bear on Myanmar by countries of influence, including the UK, has been hugely important. I think it was a combination of matters behind the scenes and publicly which helped, but it was very clear to Myanmar that the world was watching, and that if they did not use one of the mechanisms available to them to free the journalists, additional pressure would be brought to bear upon them. That has been very helpful. That combination of factors has been very

helpful in many other cases, but I do want to pay tribute to the work of Reuters; it has been superb.

Julie Posetti: Could I add one small point? I agree with the assessment of Reuters. Something to bear in mind is that the journalism profession has been reluctant, historically, to be activist on press freedom issues; it is seen as belly-gazing. I think we are starting to see a shift, and it is an important shift. The BBC could be encouraged further on that, because it is vital. I am starting to see some different perspectives being expressed.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: My clients often say to me, "As a journalist, the last thing you want to do is become the story yourself." And I am afraid that journalists who are placed under pressure in the way that BBC Persian were, or those in Egypt, Myanmar or elsewhere have been, had no choice but to become the story. Solidarity from other journalists around the world has been hugely helpful. We saw that with the "Free al-Jazeera Staff" campaign. That is all the more important where you have freelancers, who do not have the support of a network, so it is so important that someone like the International Federation of Journalists and other individual journalists come on board to amplify their voices and shout from the rooftops.

Q30 **Jo Stevens:** I sit on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee—I am a guest of the Committee today—and you will know that we have been doing a long inquiry into disinformation and fake news, so I want to ask a couple of questions about that. From your perspective, Julie and Olga, who are the main perpetrators of disinformation, with the impact that is having negatively on press freedom?

Julie Posetti: First, you have probably heard this a lot but I think it is important to work on labelling. I have seen some of the work the Committee has done. It becomes problematic when we conflate "disinformation", "misinformation", "malicious information" and "fake news", particularly because of the way in which "fake news" has been weaponised by state actors, from Duterte in the Philippines to Trump in the United States and so on. I just want to make that point up front.

It is a combination of perpetrators. It is state actors. I mentioned before that we are seeing evidence-based assessment that state trolling or state-orchestrated disinformation campaigns—state-linked, at least—exist in India, the Philippines and Brazil. We have certainly seen it in South Africa as well. They can be political parties or the state apparatus. We have seen corporate actors. We have seen the case of Bell Pottinger, our own UK public relations firm, which was deeply entrenched in the disinformation campaigns exposed by the Daily Maverick in South Africa. The report I mentioned earlier details some of this. It is also, unfortunately, a feature of state trolling that these could be loose or loosely orchestrated groups that, in the case of targeting journalists and audiences, are fomenting their strategies and their activities on other sites, such as 4chan, and then piling on to more mainstream social media sites. It is special interest groups, from those who are in anti-vaccine territory to climate change



denialists. This is a broad gamut of actors. Probably the most urgent and the most dangerous is this combinant effect that we see through these orchestrated campaigns. Arguably, this is what is under investigation on a range of levels in the US, with external actors interfering. I presume this is one of the reasons we are here. That is to give you an overview.

Journalists are among the biggest targets and, as I said before, specifically women journalists, because it is very effective to try and shut down critical journalism by targeting news brands or individual reporters and increasing exponentially the risk they face, putting demands on their time that they cannot meet. We have to understand that this is all happening in the context of defunded business model collapse, self-publication capable populations and massive changes in the distribution of information. We are in a sludgy environment where there is so much information pollution that it is not just misdirecting and misleading and, in other contexts, being weaponised, but we are at the same time seeing the drowning out of quality, credible information. We have multiple features of this situation.

Q31 Jo Stevens: Olga, it sounds like you spend a lot of your time in this sludgy information arena. What do you think?

Olga Robinson: I specialise in Russia. First, I would like to say just a few words about the term “disinformation”. The term we tend to use in BBC Monitoring and the wider BBC is that disinformation is false or misleading information that is spread deliberately with the purpose of misleading or deceiving your audience—also, with the purpose of benefiting personally, commercially or politically from it. The key element here would be the intent—the deliberate spread of such information.

I agree with Julie that there are all sorts of perpetrators out there. There are even individuals who spread disinformation just for vanity reasons, just to dupe the world and tell everyone about it. There are also wider loose groups. There are perpetrators of political disinformation and there are also commercial disinformation disseminators, who are often overlooked. They are sometimes called merchants of fake news and disinformation. They get money from advertising, and they target ordinary people browsing the internet with clickbait. They get quite a lot of money through it. Examples of that can be found in eastern Europe, and the BBC recently did a story about it, in the context of one of the Kosovo merchants of fake news.

Of course, it is not possible to talk about disinformation without also talking about political disinformation, which now attracts a lot of debate and attention. On the issue of political groups: as Julie said, it can be individual groups or loosely defined groups targeting specific individuals, companies or media organisations. That can include state-sponsored disinformation. The first perpetrator of that nature that comes to mind is Russia; also Iran and China. As we have seen over the past few years, there is evidence that Russia and Iran have been involved in covert influence operations aimed at disrupting elections and influencing debates, not necessarily political ones. The vaccines issue abroad is an example. That puts them on one side of the spectrum.



China is a slightly different case, though. We have not seen examples or evidence of China being involved in covert operations abroad in my line of work. China does use its soft power to spread messages and talking points beneficial to China through traditional media abroad. It also does that through the operation of its state-funded media, including the China Global Television Network, which recently opened an office in London for which it is hiring over 300 people in the UK. China controls the debate quite tightly inside the country. The same goes for Russia, largely—particularly when it comes to traditional media—whereas social media discussions and debate have a bit more freedom and leeway. We do not know how long that will be for, given that we are now dealing with the “sovereign internet” initiative and all the rest of it.

- Q32 **Jo Stevens:** From a journalistic perspective, where do you think the main mouthpieces of the disinformation you describe are coming from now? Is it traditional media, or is it social media?

Julie Posetti: It is a combination of those things. We need to be mindful, and put on record, that while we are sitting here defending media freedom and independent journalism, the disinformation crisis needs to be understood as a warning for traditional news organisations as well. They perhaps might not have operated with the strongest ethics, or with the “public interest” as their objective. I have examples from my own experience, where some of the worst trolling—as we would now refer to it—has actually been orchestrated by particular segments of the mainstream press.

While absolutely defending the rights of news organisations to operate and to practise, we need to be mindful of the fact that the reinforcement of quality, independent and robust journalism exists as a partial solution against disinformation and as an important defence against it. How we fund that is important, and the Committee should perhaps take that into account within their own Committee. But we have to understand that social media is not an organisation of news outlets. It is the platform, like TV, on which a combination of self-publication by citizens can occur, and on which state actors can bypass the critical role of a free press to go directly to audiences to build their own communities around their disinformation messages, for example.

- Q33 **Chair:** An element there is not quite the same. Newspapers and official media outlets act as publishers and therefore have a responsibility for the message, not just the transmission. Social media refuse to accept that they are publishers, when in fact they are, under any reasonable description of it. They curate and assess information, but they refuse to take any responsibility for it.

Julie Posetti: I am not disagreeing with your point, but one distinction we must be careful of is that by and large, social media platforms are not publishing their own content. There is certainly an argument that they are responsible for what others are publishing, but they are not fulfilling a role—

Q34 Chair: That could be said of the BBC under its new contract arrangements.

Julie Posetti: Sure. Social media is an enabler of viral, instantaneous disinformation, and our biggest problem is the way that, when spread, disinformation or misinformation is extremely difficult—nigh-on impossible—to pull back. We can debunk and emphasise fact checking. We can invest in those forms of journalism that focus on telling the stories of disinformation, and trying to clear away some of the crud, but ultimately, as you alluded to, Chair, the role of the platforms is essential to the way we respond to these crises. The sources of disinformation are many and varied. The primary amplification of disinformation is a set of social media platforms that are important to our capacity to access reliable information, and dangerous because of the ways that disinformation has spread like wildfire. Terms can be overused and clichéd—we have almost given up avoiding using them—but it really is the wild west.

Q35 Jo Stevens: So there is not enough balance between allowing freedom of expression and having some element of regulation, as would happen with a broadcaster or print media.

Julie Posetti: Exactly, or even robust self-regulation, which is essential. You were talking about the British gift to the world of self-regulated journalism, and that is something to think about in terms of understanding our biggest challenge with social media platforms, which is how to enable that free expression. In Ethiopia, for example, journalists were saying, “But social media is great. It’s given us a chance to have a new Prime Minister.” They shut down the jail where so many journalists were imprisoned, partly because of social media activism. For the sake of a bit of balance we need to appreciate that.

Q36 Jo Stevens: I know France and Germany have legislated on social media platforms. From your experience, Caoilfhionn, do you think that is working? Can we learn good things from that, or are you concerned about any aspect?

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I think curate’s egg is the short answer. We can learn some things from it, and it may be helpful for me to address that in a bit more detail in writing. There are some points of detail about France and Germany’s approach, and that of the Netherlands, which perhaps I could put in writing for you.

Olga Robinson: I know that Russia has used the European experience in enabling it to justify its own fake news legislation. That might sound ironic, but it is also important. Some states take advantage of the concerns and fears caused by disinformation, and some, ironically, are accused of and involved with spreading disinformation.

You asked about traditional media and social media, and where we see most disinformation. Social media in general has contributed to a faster, wider and broader spread of disinformation over the past years, including with the development of social media platforms as a new source and place where people can share information. That definitely has contributed to the



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evolution of disinformation, which previously would come primarily from traditional media such as newspapers—everyone knows about *Pravda* in the Soviet Union. If you look at current Russian disinformation and the way we see it in our daily work, it works as a very loose network that could include officials, state media, pro-Kremlin media, trolls, bots and actors on Twitter who ostensibly look independent. They work together as an ecosystem, but they are very loose—you may not necessarily be able to trace them back all the way to the Kremlin.

It is essential to understand that it works together. We have seen examples of multiple narratives being pushed at the same time, or being spread from online into traditional media, such as television, including foreign-facing and domestic Russian television, and then back to the internet. It is quite fascinating just to see it spread, sometimes within hours. We have seen examples of that over the past five years. I have personally seen examples of that happen on a number of occasions, from the MH17 downing to the killing of one of the opposition leaders in Russia, Boris Nemtsov, and, more recently, the whole campaign around the Skripal poisoning.

Q37 Chair: Which of the Western media were particularly quick to pick it up and re-broadcast what was effectively Kremlin propaganda?

Olga Robinson: In my line of work I focus on Russian foreign-facing and domestic media, so I would not be able to answer that question. The Russian media do pick some of the lines and some of the narratives very quickly.

Q38 Chair: Which of the Western media do the Russian media quote to reinforce Kremlin stories?

Olga Robinson: I would say that they very often twist some of the stories that they see being published. For example, whenever a story in the British media or the tabloids suits their purposes, or portrays the West in a more critical way, or in a way that suits their narrative, they would do it. I have seen many occasions when, particularly, British or German tabloids would be mentioned. It kind of works for them to reinforce their narratives.

There is a lot of talk generally that I have seen over the past few years of double standards in the way the West treats other countries or Russia, and the alleged—well, feminism gone wrong, the #MeToo movement. Any examples undermining that or presenting it as some kind of feminism gone wrong would be quickly picked up, and occasionally used, not as an isolated case, but as an example of a broader trend.

Q39 Chair: There is one last question I wanted to ask. I would be hugely grateful if you could keep this brief, because we have kept you far too long, so forgive me. The UK has said that it is investing £100 million to counter disinformation. Where would you like to see the money spent?

Julie Posetti: I wish I had had advance warning of that—I would have come up with a shopping list. First, I would argue that you need to figure



out ways to invest in robust, independent journalism. I genuinely believe that supporting the development of such journalism is one of the best ways that we have to ensure that disinformation is countered.

The second thing is an investment in media and information literacy fit for the digital age. So much of what is being taught as media literacy in schools is not even understood in a digital context. We can all critique the latest editorial from Murdoch press publication X or a *Guardian* publication, but we need to understand that the ecosystem, as Olga has suggested, in which we work is vastly more complex.

We have a role as citizens now, interacting not just with journalists and news producers but with sources—with political actors—directly. We have the capacity to do enormous harm without a sense of editorial responsibility. There is a lot that can be drawn from media education and applied broadly to society.

I firmly believe that this has to be a cradle-to-grave process: the ongoing education of citizens. That needs to include a specific understanding of how disinformation works in its international contexts and its context of media ecosystem disruption. Different approaches are required at different levels for that—basic capacity to challenge stated narratives, to fact-check and to have advanced skills in play that enable, for example, networked mapping.

Q40 Chair: I am going to hold you back. We have got £100 million not £100 billion, I'm afraid.

Julie Posetti: That's fine; I will stop. Research is the other thing.

Professor Harrison: I will be very brief because I think you have identified most of the areas. One thing that strikes me is that, when it comes to media literacy, part of the problem is that people do not understand the process of gathering information that is robust and accurate, is honestly told, and has a disposition towards truthfulness.

That is what disaggregates or changes that sort of information and moves it away from disinformation—false news. That is part of media literacy. Quite often, media literacy starts with the content, looks at it when it is there. You have to verify it and look at it. If people understood a little more about the process of gathering reliable, accurate information and being honest about it, that would be a positive place to invest.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher: I agree entirely with what Jackie and Julie have said in relation to macro investment, if I could put it that way. I also think it is quite important, if this is being taken seriously, that consideration is given to a micro focus—how in individual cases, where individual journalists or media organisations are the subject of these campaigns, like the Ayatollah BBC campaign by Iran, or the routine concerted campaign of disinformation about individuals, some thought is given to funding being available to assist in those particular campaigns.



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I also think that, in countering disinformation, much of it is not just about money. A powerful example of that is Christopher Allen. When Christopher Allen was accused of being a militant, rather than someone who was present as a journalist, there was silence from the international community in correcting that. Much of countering disinformation in micro cases is just speaking out and saying, "This is simply not right." That is something that the Foreign Office has done well in relation to BBC Persian but it should be done in other cases, too.

Olga Robinson: I don't think I am in a position to offer recommendations on investment. I would say that at the BBC, my department in particular, we talk about the need to raise awareness of techniques and trends in disinformation, and also promote media literacy. I know that the BBC has been doing that with various initiatives. We have been doing that as well in my team, just to provide context and explain how things work and what to look out for.

Chair: May I thank you all very much indeed? You have given some fantastically full and detailed answers, for which we are hugely grateful. I hope you will see some of your views reflected when we go on from here.