

Excellently distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The Second Eurasian Media Forum is really an event to celebrate. It is also an event to encourage. Not only because the chance to discuss the freedom of the press is worth celebrating and encouraging anywhere at anytime. And not just because it is taking place in Kazakhstan, an excellent venue for a forum, but also because it falls at a time when world affairs are at a difficult pass and need a lot of attention. And because personally I've always believed in dialogue as the best way of bringing together different groups, societies and peoples.

The forum is also an event to celebrate and encourage because Kazakhstan is such a good testing ground for the issues you are here to discuss. It is a very young country by many standards, its democratic life is still developing, civil society is just beginning.

We, Asians and Europeans, all agree that free mass media are an essential part of a transparent democracy. Of course democracy and freedom of information are closely interlinked. The free flow of information is the very life-blood of democratic life.

And why public opinion is sometimes confused with the press? Without free independent media there can clearly be no informed public opinion. Without informed public opinion there can be no real search for truth. So when the media are shackled then democracy is in danger.

All these dangers, restrictions, harassments by the authorities or private groups, concentration of media ownership within a few hands, even sometimes the self-censorship that journalists exert on themselves at times out of a misguided sense of patriotism: all these work against the media and against a vibrant civil society. These dangers are not confined to any country or any continent.

We in Europe often regard ourselves as examples to follow in this respect. But we must not let our guard down. We, Europeans, must redouble our efforts to safeguard real media pluralism. We must all be aware. So these issues are real issues. And the dangers are real everywhere.

And let us be thoughtful here for the media workers, especially the journalists, photographers and interpreters, who lost their lives in Iraq or elsewhere serving the cause of the truth. And they must be remembered. And I hope your discussion will be lively and informed, critical and honest. And so my very best wishes for a successful forum. Hoping to be present in your forum when the occasion will make it possible.

Thank you for your patience and really again a successful forum.