

Theo Sommer

Welcoming Remarks FPO

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Ladies and gentlemen,

As chairman of the jury that has the honor of selecting the winners of the Gerd Bucerius prize “Free Press Eastern Europe” and the Fritt Ord prize “Free Press Russia”, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our award ceremony.

Let me start by saying that I would rather not be here today. I wished – and I am sure all of you share this feeling – that there would be no need to hand out awards to journalists who do nothing but their professional duty, gathering and disseminating information, comment and background.

But, alas, in this world of ours, even along Europe’s periphery and in its near abroad, the freedom of expression – *fritt ord* – is being trampled upon and trodden underfoot. The powers that-be threaten, harass and muzzle journalists who uphold the freedom of the media – the very essence, the bedrock of democracy. A shocking number of our colleagues have been brutally murdered. Numerous others go about their business under the constant threat of persecution. In most of the 180 countries *Reporters without Borders* evaluated, the situation for journalists and independent media has considerably worsened during the past year. This is particularly noticeable in Russia, where the truth is increasingly considered an “anti-state position” and the media spreading it are bullied around or suppressed. To be true, freedom of speech is guaranteed in the constitution – not so, however, freedom *after* the speech.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the reason why today we are once again assembled in the hallowed halls of the Nobel Institute – to honor and encourage journalists, newspapers and internet platforms that keep waving the banner of

media freedom in the face of authorities frequently inclined to make short shrift of critics, dissidents and opponents.

The Bucerius Prize Free Press Eastern Europe is named after the founder and owner of DIE ZEIT, Germany's leading quality weekly. He was a shrewd lawyer, an accomplished politician, a successful publisher and a high-powered publicist, to boot. He entered the public arena after World War II to make sure that never again the freedom of the media would be suppressed in our country.

It was in his spirit that in 2000, five years after his death, the ZEIT Foundation set up the Gerd Bucerius Prize Free Press Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, too, we felt after the collapse of communism, democracy could not flourish without a vivacious free press, without watchful media and without fearless journalists. Since 2004, the ZEIT-Foundation has been cooperating with the Norwegian Institusjonen Fritt Ord. [Fritt Ord has long been focusing on the fate of media freedom in post-Communist Russia. I am very happy to say that from the very beginning our cooperation has been smooth, constructive and fruitful. We in Hamburg are proud of the partnership with our friends in Oslo, and grateful for their commitment to our common cause.]

Today it is the sixteenth time that we hand out our award, and the twelfth time that we do this together with Fritt Ord. Including this year's awards, the Bucerius Prize and Fritt Ord's prize have so far been bestowed on 97 award winners – 40 individual journalists and 57 media institutions. Most of them were daily and weekly newspapers, but in recent years news agencies and internet platforms have increasingly been included. All told, the prize money defrayed in our sixteen years amounts to almost 1,770,000 Euros. It was

money well invested. It strengthened the free word in the post-Communist orbit. It encouraged fearless publications and journalists.

This year's six prizes total 75,000 Euros. They go to three journalists; two internet platforms and one newspaper; two from Russia, three from Ukraine and one from Georgia.

Before congratulating our six award winners, I would like to say a heartfelt "thank you" to all those whose dedication, expertise of judgment constitute the pillars upon which our undertaking rests. We owe a world of thanks to our country specialists: They sift and evaluate stacks of newspapers and internet publications in a dozen different languages; their assessment provides the basis for our selection process. Then we owe thanks to all those – embassies, foundations, OSCE representatives and not least former awardees – who submit to us proposals for plausible award candidates; this year we received 42 nominations. I am also greatly indebted to the members of our jury, their competence and their wisdom. And we all are grateful for the unwavering support of our two mother ships, Fritt Ord and the ZEIT-Stiftung.

Slutligen, så skulle jag vilja säga tack så mycket till Nobel Institutet för att återigen välkomna oss i denna historiska byggnaden. Desslikes tackar jag Statssekretär Morten Høglund. Det är en stor heder för oss att Ni har övertagit i dags lovtal på våra pristagare. Thank you very much, Sir.

By way of conclusion, let me simply congratulate this year's award winners. I wish them all the best in their private lives, steadfastness in their professional pursuits, and – last, not least – the ultimate success in their public endeavors which they and their countries deserve.