

“Victory for Viktoria” annual commemoration
Commission on Culture, Science, Education and Media
Strasbourg, 1 October 2026

Speech by Ms Petra Bayr

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, dear friends,

and above all, those who carry Viktoria's memory forward.

Today we mark the second "Victory for Viktoria" day. A day that did not exist until last year. A day we wish we had never needed. And a day we will never let fade.

We are here because of Viktoria Roshchyna. A young Ukrainian journalist. She did what journalists are meant to do. She went to see for herself. She went into occupied territory. She went to find the truth and bring it back. Because she believed that people have a right to know. To know what is done in their name. And in the name of war.

She paid for that belief with her life. She was abducted. She was held. She died in captivity. Her body came home bearing the marks of what was done to her.

Next Tuesday, on the 6th of October, Viktoria would have turned 30. Maybe she would have thrown a party. Maybe a nice dinner with friends. Maybe she would have written a list of things to do before turning 40. She never got to write that list.

Allow me a personal word. I was 15 when I started writing as a journalist, at my school. And my very first political fight was a fight against censorship. At 15, I learned a simple lesson: whoever wants to control the story first tries to silence the storyteller. I have never forgotten that lesson. And as President of this Assembly, I will not let anyone forget it.

Viktoria was not the first journalist to die for the truth about this war. Tragically, she was not the last. Every year, dozens of journalists around the world are killed, jailed, or simply disappear. Swallowed by conflicts that want no witnesses.

That is why we named this day after her. And that is why my predecessor, President Rousopoulos, was right to propose it. Viktoria's name stands for all of them. For the correspondents in flak jackets, far from home. For the local reporters who cannot leave when the fighting starts. For the photographers, the fixers and the editors. They never make the headlines themselves. But they make it possible for the rest of us to understand the world.

Colleagues, this Assembly has no army. We have no borders to defend. What we have is the European Convention on Human Rights. And at its very core: freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression is not a luxury of peacetime. It is a necessity. Especially in war. Especially when the truth is inconvenient to those in power.

A soldier can be ordered to lay down a weapon. A journalist cannot be ordered to lay down the truth. That is why journalists are targeted. And that is why we must never look away.

You can kill a journalist. You cannot kill the truth.

"Victory for Viktoria" is not only mourning. It is a statement of intent. It stands alongside the Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. It is part of our Journalists Matter campaign. And that campaign says, plainly and firmly: end impunity.

Because that is the heart of the matter. Those who kill, abduct or torture journalists too often believe no one will ever hold them to account. Impunity is the second crime. Every time we say Viktoria's name in this chamber, we tell them: you are wrong.

So today, as President of this Assembly, I ask for three things.

First: remember. Not as a formality. As an act of witness. To what was taken from Viktoria. From her family and friends. And from all of us, who lost her reporting.

Second: act. Press our governments, all of them, without exception, to investigate, prosecute and punish crimes against journalists. In Ukraine, and everywhere such crimes happen.

Third: protect. Protect those who do this work right now, today, in the field. Because Viktoria's story is not over. It is still being written. In other countries, by other people, at this very moment.

Remember. Act. Protect. That is how we give Viktoria her victory.

Thank you.