

## PRIX EUROPA 2019 EUROPEAN JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

PRIX EUROPA 2019 Thank you speech of Armin Wolf at the Awards Ceremony in Potsdam on Friday 11 October 2019

I'm humbled to have been selected among so many terrific journalists, all of whom would probably deserve this honor at least as much as I do.

Of course, this is the opportunity to thank everybody, from the jury to my colleagues, my former teachers and my grandmother – but first and foremost I want to thank a man without whom I would not be standing here tonight: Harald Vilimsky (the man, you just saw in the video).

In our interview you heard him say: *"This cannot go without consequences"*.

And consequences it had: Here I stand, receiving this wonderful award. I must admit, I'm quite proud. And a little bit ashamed that I owe this to Harald Vilimsky.

Of course, Mr. Vilimsky didn't lose control during our interview. The escalation was totally calculated. And it was by far not the first time in the 17 years I have been interviewing politicians of his party.

The Freedom Party, like most populists, are not fond of traditional media, to say the least, and especially of public broadcasters. They like to call us *"redcasters"* or *"Rotfunk"*. They think most journalists are left-wing radicals, PC-terrorists or in the pockets of *"the system"* and *"the elite"* and we'd never treat them fairly.

Of course, by assuming that serious media view them with skepticism populists are not wrong. I would even say there is in fact a fundamental antagonism between populist politics and serious journalism.

Serious journalists use facts and arguments to appeal to the reason and rationality of their audience, to provide the public with the factual basis for democratic discourse.

Populist politics - just as tabloid journalism - appeals first and foremost to the emotions of its audience. And, very often, to prejudice and resentment. Actually, you could even describe populism as *tabloid politics*.

Hence, populist parties and politicians apply different strategies in dealing with journalists. They try, for example, to exploit traditional media routines by using provocations and breaking political taboos – counting on our duty to report.

They try to circumvent professional journalists by creating their own media empires, mainly on social media. (The Facebook page of Heinz-Christian Strache, the longtime Freedom Party chairman, has about 800.000 fans, in a country of 5 million voters. No wonder, he and his former party are now fighting over the Facebook page in court.)

Once in power, populists try to win control over influential media, as one can witness in Hungary in a frightening way, or as they aspired in Austria with the attempt to abolish the public broadcasting

fee. “A media landscape like Viktor Orban has it” was one of Mr. Strache’s fantasies in Ibiza, where he called journalists – I quote - “*the biggest whores on the planet*”.

This too, is a favorite strategy of populist parties: To attack journalists, personally or as a group. “*Lügenpresse*” (“*lying press*”) is one of their favorite buzzwords here in Germany.

But nobody is more open, aggressive and extreme with the name-calling than the President of the most important democracy on earth. Over and over again, Donald Trump has labeled journalists as “*fake and corrupt*”, “*degenerate haters*”, “*totally crazy and out of control*”, as “*enemies of the people*” and “*the real opposition*”.

The goal of this strategy is, of course, to discredit not only the journalists themselves but to delegitimize their work. It is a permanent attack on the very basis of our profession, on the facts we report. On the facts a democracy needs as the basis for reasonable public discourse.

And the strategy is working. According to a poll 82 per cent of republican voters in the U.S. trust Donald Trump more than the media. I find this extremely alarming.

Still, it’s not our job to react on the same level or by similar tactics. Nobody said it better than Martin Barron of the Washington Post: “*We are not at war*”, he says: “*We are at work*”.

I’m utterly convinced that this is our best answer: To do our work, as professional, diligent, reliable and fair as we can.

The late Gerd Bacher, President of Austrian Public Broadcasting and a legendary journalist, once described our work as follows: “*Journalism is differentiation. The differentiation between true and false. Between important and trivial. Between sense and nonsense.*” The journalists who are gathered here tonight do this work every day – and I’m proud to be one of you.

Finally, I do want to say THANK YOU, of course: To my fabulous colleagues at ORF, especially at ZiB2, the show I’m privileged to present. I want to thank AGRA, the committee of elected representatives of all public broadcasting journalists in Germany who safeguard press freedom within their institutions and against outside pressure every day. Their work was never more important than today and I’m proud and grateful that AGRA suggested me for this award.

And most of all I want to thank my wife Euke, who is here with me tonight and who is always a bit envious of the people I interview and debate on TV. Because with them I usually stop after 8 or 10 minutes. Even with Mr. Vilimsky.

Thank you all very much!