



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1028 Vienna, 27 November 2014

EU Statement in Response to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, to the Permanent Council and we thank her for her comprehensive report. We thank Ms. Mijatovic and her team for their tireless work, in full accordance with the mandate of this autonomous institution, to monitor the media freedom situation in our entire region, raise issues of serious concern, and assist participating States in the implementation of our common OSCE commitments. Her office has done so with professionalism and integrity.

In the course of the reporting period, Ms Mijatovic has on several occasions raised issues of concern in European Union countries. We take these interventions very seriously and are grateful for her advice. We remain committed to engaging with the RFoM on issues of concern.

We remain deeply concerned at the regressive trend in some parts of the OSCE with regard to the implementation of our freedom of expression commitments – a trend that is being compounded by broader violations of fundamental OSCE principles. In Russia, we are witnessing limitations on the free flow of information and ideas. Critical voices are increasingly silenced and the few remaining independent media outlets are under pressure. This, coupled with the proliferation of government propaganda, is narrowing public discourse. The same propaganda is at the same time being used to fuel tensions and conflict in parts of our region. This is not only a personal tragedy for those concerned, it is an unsustainable policy, clearly in contradiction of our OSCE commitments.

Regrettably, many of the serious issues that the EU has raised are still awaiting a clear response from the Russian authorities. During the recent visit of the RFoM to Moscow, she brought up several serious concerns with regard to the Russian media landscape, and we look forward to hearing from the Russian Federation how they plan to address these concerns.

We express our full support for the Representative's interventions on the situation in Azerbaijan, where the government persists in a policy of increasing intimidation against journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and others who exercise their right to freedom of expression. The European Union has repeatedly voiced its deep concern in this regard. The RFoM has raised several individual cases, most recently the detention of Mehman Huseynov and the travel restrictions imposed on Khadija Ismaylova. We join the Representative in calling on the Government of Azerbaijan to end its hostile attitude towards free media and uphold freedom of expression. We will continue to closely follow individual cases, as well as broader developments in Azerbaijan.

Undue restrictions on media freedom and freedom of expression in several other countries are matters of concern to the EU. The intermittent blocking of websites and social media in Tajikistan is a case in point, and we join the RFoM in her call to the Tajik authorities to allow unhindered access to the media and the internet. Elsewhere, we have seen a concerning trend towards the stifling of independent media outlets, as evidenced by the recent decision of a court in Kazakhstan to close the magazine Adam Bol.

We also witness increasing pressure on online media in several countries, including in the Western Balkans. We reiterate our call on the Government of Serbia, our incoming Chairmanship in Office, to lead by example and engage with the RFoM on steps that could be taken to improve the media freedom situation in the country. And we call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to protect journalists in that country from

coercion, noting that the protection of a free press is a crucial element of a functioning democracy.

Finally, in Ukraine, there has been an increase in the intimidation and harassment of members of the media. In particular, pro-Russian separatists are severely obstructing the free flow of information through violence, intimidation and threats, in areas that are under their de-facto control. We are also concerned about reports of increasing pressure by the Russian authorities on the free flow of information and ideas in Crimea, especially with regard to Crimean Tatar media. We call on all parties to respect media freedom and refrain from violence against journalists and other media actors.

In light of this worrying trend, we remained convinced that the OSCE needs to send a clear statement of its commitment to ensuring freedom of expression and media freedom, in particular at next week's Ministerial Council. We welcome the support that we have received for our proposal for a Ministerial Decision and hope that participating States can unite around a strong statement of support for this fundamental freedom, which enables the enjoyment of many other human rights and is central to our comprehensive approach to security. We thank the RFoM again for her work to support participating States in the implementation of their OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom, and for being such a strong advocate for these freedoms.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.