



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Teresa Ribeiro**

13 June 2024

Regular Report to the Permanent Council

For the period from 23 November 2023 to 13 June 2024

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to present to you today my bi-annual report to the Permanent Council, covering the period from 23rd November 2023 to today. It is my seventh and last report as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Therefore, I would like to start by thanking you for the close co-operation I have enjoyed with many of you during the last three-and-a-half years and for the trust you have bestowed upon me, entrusting me with this extremely important mandate. It has truly been an honor.

While I will, during the next half hour or so, as per usual practice, provide an analytical overview of the media freedom situation in our region, I will also take the opportunity in this final report to adopt a broader approach. I will not only reflect on my observations and endeavors throughout the past seven months, but will situate them within the OSCE framework of comprehensive security, and look forward.

Before starting, I want to honor the important work of Christophe Deloire, Director General of Reporters without Borders who tragically died last Saturday. A relentless advocate for media freedom, pluralism, and democracy worldwide – his legacy will remain. We can best pay tribute to him by continuing his unwavering pursuit of media freedom.

Three years ago, in my inaugural report to the Permanent Council, I expressed optimism, firmly convinced that we collectively recognize the paramount importance of media freedom in our societies, convinced that we all stand united in our determination to pursue the OSCE commitments in this regard and advance media freedom for the benefit of peace and security.

In my five consecutive reports, however, you may have noticed a gradually more troubling portrayal in my assessment. Unfortunately, media freedom in our region has faced unprecedented disruptions, marked by escalating repression in a broader context of democratic decline and conflicts being waged within our region. When assessing this broader democratic deterioration, we can see that the main indicators are linked to violations of media freedom, freedom of expression and an overall shrinking of public civic spaces. At the same time, we can see – as the other side of the same coin – that freedom of expression is the most affected component of a withering democracy.

Over the past seven months, challenges have intensified on multiple fronts, exacerbated by numerous crises and further compounded by the exploitation of the media and the information landscape through authoritarian control and technological information disorders. I continuously spoke out against particularly concerning developments in certain parts of our region, including following the terrible full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the

Russian Federation, which was accompanied by a complete media crackdown in Russia. I witnessed and spoke out against a similar situation in Belarus.

While these observations are not new to you, dear Excellencies, I am afraid that the failure to guarantee media freedom and healthy information spaces is increasingly disillusioning and disenfranchising people throughout our region, posing additional challenges to our collective efforts to uphold democratic principles and, ultimately, security. While it may seem daunting to remain optimistic amid this increasingly grim situation, it is precisely during these challenging times that our dedication to the fundamental values of this organization is most crucial.

In his opening speech, this year's Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Ian Borg, emphasized that "*What we do for peace today will help determine whether we live in war tomorrow.*" Along the same lines, on World Press Freedom Day last month, when speaking about the existential crisis of media freedom on a global scale, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa stressed that "*What we do today, matters.*" I share this sentiment wholeheartedly. We have to stand up for media freedom, and the moment to do so has never been more urgent than now. There is no time for despair. There is no time for inaction. We depend on quality media and public interest information to strengthen resilience, to empower people, and to protect democracy for the sake of our common security.

We must recall the *Helsinki Spirit*, reflecting the foundational principles that underpin this organization. Almost half a century ago, the Helsinki Final Act emphasized the right of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas without any interference. This commitment to a free, independent media was, and remains, an integral part of the OSCE's agenda for peace and security.

And it is the essence of the mandate that I proudly serve: to protect and promote media freedom for the benefit of our common peace and security. Bound by the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, this mandate demands impartiality, but it is not neutral. Committed to these values, this unique mandate for an intergovernmental media freedom watchdog has to provide early warnings, rapid response and assistance in line with the overarching aim to further free, independent and pluralistic media for the sake of our common security. This also means that I had to remain undeterred by attempts to undermine its very purpose. As an autonomous institution, I have defended our shared commitments and I have served as voice independent from governments. Since I was entrusted with this mandate three and a half years ago, the *Helsinki Spirit* has guided my actions, and I am sure this very same spirit will continue to guide this mandate in the future.

This institution is now needed more than ever.

Dear Excellencies, if peace and security are our genuine shared priorities, as the OSCE participating States, you all, have the responsibility to support this institution and this organization to fulfil their mandates. As I conclude my tenure, I am determined to leave on a hopeful note, providing a forward-looking vision for the future of media freedom in the OSCE region.

False dichotomy of security versus media freedom

Today's multiple security concerns and geopolitical complexities have led many authorities to take a restrictive approach towards fundamental freedoms and human rights. Despite the legitimacy of such security concerns and states' responsibility to ensure national security and public order, I have observed governmental over-interventions, leading to repression of independent media, a shrinking space for civil society, and constrictions on public debate. We need to find the best way to avoid turning this tension into a false dichotomy: media freedom is an integral part of our security, not adverse to it. An "either-or fallacy" is particularly alarming in the context of the overall deterioration of rule of law and growing authoritarian urges toward social control, which we can see across the OSCE region. Attempts to further shrink our civic spaces are oftentimes misleadingly justified by the illusion of enhancing security through information control. Sidelining human rights, however, is always a shortsighted approach, one that transforms into a security concern itself. For instance, I witnessed such trends in the context of combating disinformation and foreign information manipulation. In order to identify ways to comprehensively tackle this challenge and bridge the gap, I will soon host a roundtable, bringing together scholars and practitioners from the security and the media (freedom) sector.

I have repeatedly called out against the misuse of vague anti-extremism or anti-terrorism legislation for prosecuting critical voices. In several parts of the OSCE region, we witness discussions, proposals for, or the adoption of different forms of legal measures that require civil society organizations and media outlets to declare foreign funding or other forms of support they receive from abroad. Such legislation often aims to tighten governmental control over information, leading to stigmatization and bureaucratic harassment, resulting in societal divisions and risking serious negative implications on media freedom and freedom of expression. During the reporting period, due to the threats it poses to independent media and civil society, I expressed worries about Georgia's "transparency of foreign influence" law, and I deeply regret the recent decision of the Georgian Parliament to push through and adopt the law, despite the President's veto. I am equally worried about the adoption of Kyrgyzstan's bill on so-called "foreign representatives," despite the concerns I raised throughout the process. I closely monitor the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a similar legislative proposal has been put forward by the Republika Srpska's entity government. Its withdrawal for now is a positive step, but even when redrafted, the concerns about burdensome and stigmatizing effects on media and civil society remain valid.

I also voiced my concerns about media capture and other attempts to gain political influence over our information spaces. Since my last report, for instance, I have witnessed both instances of political interference in public service media as well as misuse of public funds and/or laws and practices aiming to politically influence or control private media. For a genuinely independent and pluralistic media landscape, it is essential to ensure that the public service media can fully play its role and fulfil its legal mandate in serving the public interest, and that all state funding, direct or through advertising, is allocated in a transparent, non-discriminatory and fair manner. Moreover, OSCE participating States should ensure independent regulatory authorities and due process. In Moldova, I raised the administrative mechanism regarding the suspension of the broadcasting licenses for several television stations. In addition, OSCE participating States should promote media self-regulation and invest in the sustainability of independent, pluralistic media, including at the local and community levels.

Across the OSCE, we have a robust tradition of public service media. But there is clear room for improvement to substantiate public interest. OSCE participating States should ensure genuine independence of public service media, both in law and in practice, and adequately resource them to fulfil their public interest mandate. I reiterated this in Slovakia and, during my visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I called on the authorities to find a robust solution to the longstanding funding issue that is negatively impacting the financial sustainability and independence of the public service broadcasting system, threatening its very existence.

Conflict and authoritarianism

The terrible war in the heart of our region, waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, continues to disrupt our common security, impacting significantly our people and our organization. The situation is extremely dire, with at least ten media workers having been killed in the line of duty, and many more journalists losing their lives as a consequence of the war. Over the last months, many foreign and local journalists and media workers were again targeted, physically and verbally attacked, injured, or disappeared. Some Ukrainian journalists were also deprived of their liberty by the Russian Federation, as indicated in the latest observations of the mission of experts established under the Moscow Mechanism in April 2024. At the same time, media equipment and infrastructure, particularly TV towers, continued to be damaged and attacked, as seen with the recent shelling of a TV tower in Kharkiv, which severely impacts the media's ability to fulfil its function. I reiterate my call to respect, protect, and ensure the safety of journalists and their devices, such as broadcasting infrastructure, as required by international law. In pursuing justice and peace, all crimes will have to be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible held to account. Once again, journalists and their indispensable work will play a crucial role in ensuring such accountability.

The persistent hostile environment for dissenting voices in unlawfully annexed Crimea is also deeply concerning, especially against citizen journalists from the Crimean Tatar community. In an increasingly restrictive media freedom context, these voices serve as vital sources for information, for protecting minority's right to freedom of expression and for exposing human rights violations. Unfortunately, the dire situation in Crimea mirrors the same media freedom challenges witnessed within Russia.

Which brings me to the situation in the Russian Federation, where the relentless crackdown of any remaining independent media has reached unprecedented levels and where citizens have been virtually deprived of any form of unbiased sources of information. The pervasive practice of silencing critical voices continues with an increasing number of news outlets being declared 'undesirable' and outlawed, and journalists being designated as 'foreign agents.' The ongoing attacks and imprisonments of independent journalists for simply doing their work, blockages of international information sources, and continuing harassment of journalists living in exile illustrate the grim picture of an information landscape where any courageous effort to disseminate independent news and information carries a profound personal risk. In the reporting period, I raised concerns about the imprisonment and harassment of twelve journalists and media workers and I want to use this opportunity to again call for the immediate release of all detained journalists, while stressing the imperative to cease the suppression of their legitimate work.

In Belarus, a similarly bleak picture unfolds as journalists and media workers continue to face persistent harassment, arbitrary arrests, and unjust sentences on fabricated charges. The current imprisonment or detention of more than thirty media workers demonstrates the level of direct attacks on media freedom. This crackdown is accompanied by a vigorous repression of free speech and information exchange, with independent voices encountering intimidation, pressure, and the risk of being labeled as 'extremist'. Particularly, the systemic abuse of anti-extremism laws to clamp down on independent journalism detrimentally impacts the safety and rights of journalists as well as the overall free flow of information. During the reporting period, I raised the detention cases of four media workers, calling for their immediate release.

I am reminded of the words of Hannah Arendt, the great philosopher and political theorist, exploring the dynamics of totalitarianism, who wrote that *"a people that no longer can believe anything cannot make up its own mind. It is deprived not only of its capacity to act, but also of its capacity to think and to judge. And with such a people, you can then do what you please."* This is what authoritarian leaders strive to achieve, citizen deprived of independent, reliable and trustworthy information, deprived of facts.

Safety of Journalists

Media freedom can only exist when journalists are safe to do their work, without fear of reprisal. Deplorably, however, the overall environment for journalists and independent media across the OSCE region is worrying. I have observed escalating threats to journalists, ranging from arbitrary detentions and seizure of journalistic equipment to physical and online violence against journalists and legal harassment, including strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).

During the reporting period, a growing political hostility toward independent and critical journalism led to journalists and media workers being arrested merely for doing their work, followed in some cases by prolonged detentions, movement restrictions or intimidations of their relatives. I intervened in such cases in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Türkiye and Russia. I have witnessed a mounting pressure, with an increasing misuse of defamation, disinformation, and anti-terrorism legislation, and trumped-up charges concerning taxes, drugs or other felonies. I intervened on such cases in Türkiye and in the case of a Turkish Cypriot journalist. Abuse of the legal and judicial system to intimidate, burden, and silence journalists often include arbitrary accreditation processes, or searching of offices and homes, and seizing media equipment. This not only represents a serious breach of journalists' rights and their professional responsibility to protect the confidentiality of their sources, but also impacts the public's right to be informed. I intervened on such cases in Albania, Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan.

A troublesome aspect in this context is the rise in surveillance methods to target journalists. During the deliberations on the European Union's European Media Freedom Act, I raised concerns regarding this trend and am relieved that a national security exemption has not been included in the final legislation. Expanding surveillance without robust safeguards not only jeopardizes privacy, but also hampers the unrestricted exchange of information. I raised concerns about the extension of a surveillance-allowing law in the United States of America known as Section 702, and welcome the solutions found by the relevant authorities that alleviated my most pressing worries regarding journalists' ability to conduct their work effectively. As underscored in my September 2023 Communiqué, surveillance of journalists severely impedes their ability to report freely and to protect their sources. Moreover, it ignites broader chilling effects on the media and free flow of information. Any use of digital surveillance tools must be exercised with utmost caution, adhere to stringent criteria, be deemed necessary within a democratic society, and proportional to the legitimate aim pursued. The use of extremely invasive and intrusive spyware against journalists starkly contradicts OSCE principles and the commitments participating States are bound to uphold.

In the reporting period, the range of physical violence, online attacks, and aggressive behavior against journalists continued to escalate and diversify. I have intervened on such cases in Albania, Georgia, Germany, Portugal, Serbia and Türkiye, calling on authorities to protect the

media's ability to report freely, including when reporting on protests, demonstrations, and other public interest events. Over the past months, I have also witnessed an increasing amount of cyberattacks and hacking of media outlets, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Hungary, as well as new forms of smear campaigns to attack the reputation of individual journalists, but also to undermine the credibility of the media and the facts they report on. Attempts to discredit journalists are often a well-crafted strategy of populist narratives to fuel anti-media sentiments, sow distrust, and deepen polarization in society. Overall, I am concerned by the role politicians and public officials play in verbal and legal attacks against journalists, attacks that erode public trust and fuel further violence. Such dangerous rhetoric against, and scapegoating of, the media chills freedom of expression and media freedom, as also stated in the 2021 Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression. I intervened on such cases in Germany and Moldova.

Technological advancements like artificial intelligence (AI) and ramifications of attention-based business models that reward lies, anger, and hatred have further diminished the safety of journalists. Online violence effectively silences journalistic voices and triggers more violence, especially in a culture of impunity that signals the acceptability of such attacks. If the perpetrators – including those behind the attacks – are not brought to justice, we enter a circle of violence and risk that legitimate safety considerations will outweigh individual journalists' efforts to cover certain topics, angles or perspectives. The subsequent effect of an impunity culture is an environment ripe for crime, abuse and corruption, essentially eroding the rule of law and democratic principles. Thorough investigations into attacks, including online violence and abuse of surveillance, is essential to ensure accountability, to contribute to restoring trust and to strengthen the ability of journalists to do their job. I underlined the need to break the vicious circle of impunity and reignite efforts to ensure full accountability for the assassination of journalist Giorgos Karaivaz, in Greece, Ján Kuciak, in Slovakia, and Duško Jovanović, who was murdered 20 years ago in Montenegro. I also expressed my deep concern regarding the setback caused by the unfortunate acquittal in the murder case of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, in Serbia. The true test of a rule of law-based society is how it delivers justice, especially to those who put themselves at risk to uphold the values of a free press. I will also keep an eye on the judicial processes of the assassination of journalists Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, and of Peter R. de Vries in the Netherlands. I am relieved to hear that yesterday a Dutch court convicted several suspects for the killing of investigative reporter de Vries.

In order to tackle the manifold challenges to the safety of journalists just outlined, I launched last November the Safety of Journalists Toolbox. This continually evolving online application supports action to close the implementation gap of the Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on the Safety of Journalists through guidance, good practice examples of national instruments and initiatives, and by fostering close co-operation and co-ordination. To this end, we established a network of National Focal Points, designated – or to be designated – by

each of the OSCE participating States. Their second in-person meeting, which took place in March 2024 in Rome, offered a successful platform for a continued exchange of experiences and initiatives and to update the Safety of Journalists Toolbox.

The gendered nature of online violence continues to be alarming, with women journalists facing both a significantly higher number of attacks, with increasingly vicious characteristics and tactics. These oftentimes co-ordinated attempts to silence women result in the withdrawal of female voices, perspectives, and stories from the public spaces. Therefore, I am currently in the phase of extending the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) project that was started in 2015. Moreover, last October, I launched the Guidelines for Monitoring Online Violence Against Female Journalists. This monitoring guide encourages OSCE participating States to recognize and act upon the risks of online violence escalation, in order to ultimately ensuring plurality of journalistic voices.

In view of assisting OSCE participating States and others to improve the safety of journalists across our region, my Office organized a regional South-Eastern Europe Safety of Journalists event in Podgorica in May. Titled "Beyond the Headlines: Protecting Journalists to Advance Media Freedom," the event brought together journalists, media representatives, legal experts and researchers from across the South-Eastern Europe region and beyond. A similar regional event for Central Asia will take place later this month, in Almaty. I am grateful for the interest and participation of the authorities of Montenegro and Kazakhstan. These initiatives foster resilience and network building, and provide a platform for interactive exchange on current challenges and for sharing of good practices and actionable guidance. This equips journalists with valuable knowledge and practical tools for protecting their safety online and offline. Additionally, we organized, co-hosted, and participated in a variety of important conferences, workshops, and meetings, which you can see in the annex to this report.

Dear Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the reporting period, I have grown increasingly concerned about the prevailing atmosphere of rising tensions, amidst multiple crises. Any crisis, be it armed conflict, COVID, or the climate emergency, creates threats for the enjoyment of human rights, and, in particular, freedom of expression, access to information, and media freedom – which are, in their own right, essential preconditions to address any of these challenges.

Last month, on World Press Freedom Day, together with three other free speech mandate holders of the multilateral system, we launched a Joint Declaration on "Climate Crisis and Freedom of Expression." It states clearly that enhancing access to information and promoting transparency are crucial for fostering public debate and enabling individuals and societies to take informed decisions on climate issues. Independent media plays an essential role in

enhancing our understanding of challenges to mobilize and empower people to take action for change, and scrutinize any steps taken.

I am particularly concerned about the growing number of geographic areas with limited access to independent information and quality media, often referred to as “news deserts.” Journalistic coverage about environmental issues is essential to raise awareness and help people understand the urgency to act, to enable concerted action, to promote accountability of those responsible for environmental crimes and to scrutinize any actions taken. However, areas affected by conflict, organized crime, or extractive activities, and rural areas where environmental harm often occurs, are typically underrepresented in media coverage and international reporting. This is a consequence both of the economic weakness of the media, as well as the fact that, in many of these regions, it is too dangerous for journalists to work. Those reporting on these critical issues face disproportionate risks and attacks. The lack of access to information exacerbates marginalization and weakens democratic processes. We cannot afford to remain uninformed about the most pressing issues of our time, nor can we accept being kept in the dark due to dangers associated with reporting on certain issues. On the contrary, to address today’s existential challenges, we must ensure the availability and accessibility to quality media and public interest information.

Disruptions in the digital media and information landscape

Many of the concerns I raised in this report directly correlate to technological disruptions, be it media sustainability, anti-media sentiments, online violence against (women) journalists or disinformation.

Disinformation, in fact, has often been declared as one of the key challenges of our time. During the reporting period, mis-, disinformation, and foreign information manipulation and interference have taken on increasingly innovative forms – from misusing credible news outlet’s logos, mimicking reliable media, to resembling their web presence in view of sowing confusion or spreading false narratives and fraudulent content. Today’s technology is characterized by an unprecedented concentration of power. At the same time, large language models, much like social media, are not anchored in facts or accuracy and facilitate the exploitation of democratic liberties and openness by authoritarians and profit-driven private actors. The integrity of information is central, just as the integrity of our information spaces themselves. Last November, I launched a Resource Hub to put a Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Freedom of Expression (SAIFE), which provides solution-oriented guidance to address challenges stemming from AI-based content moderation and curation that negatively impact our information spaces. I am confident that this tool will help identify responses to digital free speech challenges – responses that are rooted in human rights, the public interest, and an understanding of local contexts.

During the reporting period, various governments have resorted to indiscriminate blockings of allegedly harmful content, websites or platforms, often through anti-disinformation legislation. In the past year, for instance, I have witnessed attempts by the Russian Federation to strategically target internet infrastructure in Ukraine while restricting internet access in occupied territories, which limits people's access to information.

Internet shutdowns are typically linked to other human rights violations, while simultaneously concealing them. They can seriously obstruct individuals' ability to speak freely and impart information. While sometimes triggered by legitimate security concerns, such measures can foster tendencies towards controlling narratives, jeopardizing the societal resilience needed to combat deception and polarization. Instead, we must prioritize addressing the root causes and invest in availability and accessibility of quality information.

This becomes particularly important this year, as half of the world's population are casting their votes. With a decline in reliable news, an increase in propaganda, and a lack of integrity in information spaces, we lose agency and run the risk of harming democratic resilience. This directly echoes the findings of Hannah Arendt whom I referenced before. When information disorders erode trust to the point where people don't believe anything, they are deprived of their capacity to think freely and critically, they are susceptible to manipulation and lose faith in democratic principles.

Framework for the public interest

Despite these manifold challenges and concerns, I have the duty to remain hopeful, envisioning healthy information spaces that empower people, strengthen democratic resilience, and enhance security.

This is in line with what Belarusian oppositional leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said during this year's meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: "Rule of law, democracy, and human rights cannot be a dream, but must be the future."

This hopeful outlook is reinforced by encouraging developments in the past months, such as the Joint Statement on the Safety of Women Journalists endorsed by 45 OSCE participating States at the 2023 Ministerial Council, overcoming a lack of consensus for new human dimension commitments. I am also encouraged by individual participating States, which during this reporting period have led by good example when it comes to the safety of journalists or overcoming previous shortcomings. For example, Austria has adopted a Freedom of Information Act; Canada pushed for fair compensation for news by online platforms who use their content; Kazakhstan increased penalties for those obstructing journalism; Türkiye's Constitutional Court increased safeguards against undue removal and blocking of online content; the United Kingdom initiated legislation to strengthen the public

service media; and the United States of America imposed strict limitations against surveillance of journalists with its PRESS Act.

I am also encouraged by several regulatory frameworks at the European Union level to enhance safety of journalists and media freedom, ranging from the Anti-SLAPPs Directive and the Artificial Intelligence Act, to the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and, particularly, the European Media Freedom Act. I am grateful that I could contribute to most of these initiatives, just as to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on artificial intelligence, human rights and democracy – a promising legal framework open to all OSCE participating States.

It is your responsibility now, dear Excellencies, to ensure that these and similar positive developments are explored, adopted and implemented, and are fully benefitting media freedom, democracy, and security. Each one of you has the opportunity to set an example, to protect this mandate, and to collaborate to enhance media freedom. I am hopeful that the participating States will take on the work of this institution and further its principles on the national, regional, and international level. This organization, the *Helsinki Spirit*, depends on it.

I want to engage you in a new concept, that of a Public Interest Framework. It explores the notion that the current human rights framework might not be sufficient to uphold media freedom and freedom of expression as we know it, since it has been in some cases misused and weaponized by authorities of certain participating States and further undermined by Big Tech. While human rights remain a key pillar of security, and in no way need to be reviewed or revised, in their realization, there may be a need to add a layer that reflects the collective societal level of public interest. To achieve this, healthy information spaces that build on public interest are needed to guarantee media freedom and the availability and visibility of quality information to enable open debate, scrutiny of those in power, and upholding our rule-of-law-based democracies, thereby safeguarding our common peace and security. Technology should be leveraged to reinforce democratic processes and provide healthy information spaces for a well-informed public debate.

At the same time, we must invest in enhancing resilience against information manipulation and in refining skills to critically evaluate and engage in today's information ecosystem. Over the course of my mandate, to address this need, I introduced the concept of Media Freedom Literacy, to deepen individuals' and society's understanding of the democratic functions of the media and the significance of an independent, inclusive, well-functioning media landscape serving the public interest. A few weeks ago, in the framework of a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting dedicated to the crucially important topic of media literacy and democracy, I published a report on fostering Media Freedom Literacy across the OSCE region. As practical tool, it provides an overview of promising practices and offers guidelines to different actors, emphasizing the need for a whole-of-society approach.

Throughout all my endeavours, I placed particular emphasis on the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and meaningful networking. The convening power of this mandate has created networks of journalists, academia, civil society, media, independent bodies and State representatives to come together to raise awareness, share good practices, and collaborate to address challenges. Striving for comprehensive security requires us to bring together all parts of society, acknowledging their respective roles and responsibilities to protect human rights. I am deeply convinced that we must bridge different communities and enhance co-operation among stakeholders in the *Helsinki Spirit* of comprehensive security.

Conclusion

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have said it before, the reason we insist on media freedom lies in its fundamental role in the nexus connecting human rights, democracy and security. This is also the key message of last year's Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy, which I launched together with the other free speech mandate holders of the multilateral system. Democracy thrives on diverse opinions, policies, and deliberations, all of which require a foundation rooted in facts and a shared reality. Media freedom strengthens democracies and equips societies to navigate crises more effectively. Democratic societies, in turn, are less likely to engage in conflict. While we cannot isolate challenges, and while media freedom alone cannot prevent conflict, it is indispensable for both democracy and security.

On 17 July, I will host a high-level event to discuss the causal and correlational relationship between media freedom, democracy and security as vital factor for peace across the OSCE region. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, I sincerely hope that it will help us in upholding the *Helsinki Spirit* and its vision of safeguarding media freedom for peace and security.

Merely reacting to challenges with a defensive strategy has proven insufficient. It is our responsibility to shape a new narrative for human rights, one that can revive in the heart of our citizens the priceless meaning of "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." You are key in this endeavor. We all have a positive obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to freedom of expression and media freedom – as drivers for all other human rights.

In conclusion, I want to express my sincere thanks to all OSCE structures, including the field operations, the Secretariat, ODIHR and HCNM, and the Parliamentary Assembly. I want to

thank the Maltese Chairpersonship for its firm support and excellent co-operation. Throughout the reporting period, numerous collaborative initiatives have showcased the potential for meaningful achievements through collective efforts. These initiatives range from joint legal reviews with ODIHR to collaborative events such as on hate speech or on the occasion of this year's International Women's Day.

I would also like to thank all external partners, the dedicated media community, civil society, academia and individual journalists, the privilege I had of meeting and collaborating with them over my tenure. Their contributions have been indispensable to the accomplishments and resources I have put forward. Moreover, I want to express my gratitude to you, the OSCE participating States, and particularly those that have provided us with support through extrabudgetary contributions or the secondment of qualified staff. Thank you to the delegations of Austria, Bulgaria, the Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America for your support. Last but not least, on this occasion I want to express my deep gratitude to my excellent team for demonstrating profound expertise and true dedication for the cause of media freedom.

Let me end here, with the slogan I have used to commemorate the 25th anniversary of this precious mandate: There can be no security without media freedom.

ANNEX

20/11 – 26/11	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conference “Shaping the Future: Media Freedom and Security in a Changing World” - Event launching the Safety of Journalists Toolbox - Event launching the Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists - Event launching the SAIFE Resource Hub <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Incoming letters: 2</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists</p>
27/11 – 03/12	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Side event on “Safety of Female Journalists Online” at the Ministerial Council <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 2 Incoming letters: 2</p>	<p>Legal harassment/SLAPPS Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information</p>
04/12 – 10/12	<p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Rule of law/legislative issues Legal harassment/SLAPPS</p>
11/12 – 17/12	<p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues</p>
18/12 – 24/12	<p>Outgoing letters: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Safety of Journalists Digital security of media workers</p>
25/12 – 31/12	<p>Outgoing letters: 4 Incoming letters: 2</p>	<p>Safety of Journalists</p>
01/01 – 07/01	<p>Outgoing letters: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Legal harassment/SLAPPS Arrest/detention</p>
08/01 – 14/01	<p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information</p>

15/01 – 21/01	Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 1 Social Media: 3	Safety of journalists Digital security of media workers Legal Harassment/SLAPPS
22/01 – 28/01	Bilateral meetings: 5 Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 4 Social Media: 4	Safety of journalists Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Digital security of media workers
29/01 – 04/02	Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 5 Incoming letters: 1 Press Releases: 1 Social Media: 2	Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues Digital security of media workers Legal Harassment/SLAPPS
05/02 – 11/02	Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Press Releases: 1	Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues
12/02 – 18/02	Bilateral meetings: 1 Incoming letters: 3	Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues
19/02 – 25/02	Events of the week: - OSCE Parliamentary Assembly 23 rd Winter Meeting – General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions and side event on “The OSCE RFoM Safety of Journalists Toolbox – closing the implementation gap” ----- Bilateral meetings: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 7	Safety of journalists Digital security of media workers Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues

26/02 – 03/03	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional South East Europe Safety of Journalists Focal Point meeting for OSCE field operations <p>-----</p> <p>Outgoing letters: 4 Social Media: 2</p>	<p>Safety of journalists Arrest/detention Legal Harassment/SLAPPS</p>
04/03 – 10/03	<p>Official visit: EU institutions and NATO</p> <p>During this visit, I engaged in discussions on pressing challenges to media freedom across EU Member States and the broader OSCE region, as well as recent regulatory changes with an emphasis on the importance of media freedom in maintaining security.</p> <p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High-level event on “Women in Public Life” <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 5 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 1 Press Releases: 3 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Digital security of media workers Arrest/detention Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists</p>
11/03 – 17/03	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FRA Fundamental Rights Forum: Human Rights Table on “Ensuring rights-compliant digitalization” - International Women’s Day – Joint event on “Under the Watchful Eye: Human Rights, Gender and Surveillance” - Expert Seminar on “Artificial Intelligence in the Context of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Challenges, Risks and Opportunities” <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 2</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues</p>
18/03 – 24/03	<p>Country visit: Italy</p>	

	<p>During the visit, I discussed with high-level State officials the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists and the independence of public service media. While discussing the crucial nexus between media freedom and security, I stressed concerns about the criminalization of defamation, which can exert a chilling effect on journalistic activities.</p> <p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Focal Point Meeting in the framework of the Safety of Journalists project <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 2 Press Releases: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Rule of law/legislative issues Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Safety of journalists</p>
25/03 – 31/03	<p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 5 Incoming letters: 2 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Digital security of media workers Legal Harassment/SLAPPS</p>
01/04 – 07/04	<p>Social Media: 2</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Legal Harassment/SLAPPS</p>
08/04 – 14/04	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conference on “Addressing Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region” - Webinar on “Safeguarding the integrity of online information spaces: peacebuilding and platform governance in times of crisis” <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 2 Social Media: 6</p>	<p>Digital security of media workers Safety of journalists</p>
15/04 – 21/04	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Journalism Festival – event on “Safety of Journalists Toolbox and Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists” <p>-----</p>	

	<p>Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 2 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Safety of journalists Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues Arrest/detention</p>
22/04 – 28/04	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Conference on Media Literacy and Media Self-Regulation in Kyiv - Regional Conference on “Addressing the Prevailing Digital Information Disorder: Countering the Use of the Internet by Terrorists and Violent Extremists” <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 3 Outgoing letters: 2 Social Media: 1</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Digital security of media workers Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information</p>
29/04 – 05/05	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - World Press Freedom Day Conference: Launch of the Joint Declaration on Climate Crisis and Freedom of Expression - World Press Freedom Day Conference, Side event on “Interlinkages Between Media Freedom, Democracy, and Security in Times of Crisis” - World Press Freedom event on "Challenges for Journalists in Conflict Zones" <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 3 Press Releases: 2 Social Media: 2</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Arrest/detention Safety of journalists Legal Harassment/SLAPPS</p>
06/05 – 12/05	<p>Country visit: Montenegro</p> <p>During the visit, I engaged with several high-level State officials, the Ombudsperson for Human Rights, representatives of the media, civil society and several journalists on the ongoing media legislation and policy reforms and the safety conditions of journalists. I reiterate my call to the authorities to reignite efforts to resolve longstanding impunity cases, ensure the safety of journalists, and provide for strong, independent</p>	

	<p>and well-functioning public service broadcaster serving the public interest.</p> <p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OSCE South East Europe safety of journalists event on “Beyond the Headlines: Protecting journalists to advance media freedom” - Cine ONU Vienna screening of "20 Days in Mariupol " and discussion to mark World Press Freedom Day <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 10 Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Press Releases: 1</p>	Safety of journalists
13/05 – 19/05	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - KAICIID Global Dialogue Forum <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 9 Incoming letters: 2</p>	Safety of journalists Rule of law/legislative issues Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information
20/05 – 26/05	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Press Institute (IPI) World Congress, including a side event on “Gendered hate speech ad disinformation: Evaluating risks and ways forward” and a workshop on “Leveraging technology towards healthy information spaces” - While in Sarajevo for the IPI World Congress, I had two bilateral meetings with high-level State officials. I reiterated that strong political commitment by all relevant authorities across Bosnia and Herzegovina is needed to secure a pluralistic and free media freedom environment in the country, where journalists can work in the public interest, free from any pressure or intimidation. <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 3 Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 4</p>	Rule of law/legislative issues Disinformation/Propaganda Safety of journalists Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information

27/05 – 02/06	<p>Events of the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Media Literacy and Democracy - Event launching the OSCE RFoM's Report "Fostering Media Freedom Literacy Across the OSCE Region" <p>-----</p> <p>Peer review of ODIHR's Urgent Opinion on Georgia's Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 6 Press Releases: 1 Social Media: 3</p>	Disinformation/Propaganda Safety of journalists Rule of law/legislative issues
03/06 – 09/06	<p>Joint ODIHR-RFoM Opinion on the Draft Information Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 5</p>	Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists Legal Harassment/SLAPPS
10/06 – 13/06	<p>Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 1 Social Media: 1</p>	Safety of journalists Rule of law/legislative issues Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information