



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1288 Vienna, 5 November 2020

## EU Statement on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

On November 2, we marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The European Union commends the work of journalists and media actors, and pays tribute to all those who lost their lives or suffered attacks when exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression, both online and offline.

Democracy cannot exist without free, diverse and independent media. Journalists and media actors across the globe hold States, government officials and business corporations accountable for their actions. They uncover abuses of power, corruption and human rights violations, very often putting themselves at risk of intimidation, violence and even death.

Such attacks are not only attacks against the individual journalists, but against the very foundations of our open, free and democratic societies. The EU continues standing by all those who have the courage to speak up for us all, and in defence of our democratic values.

All violations of freedom of expression and media freedom online and offline must stop. Impunity for crimes against journalists – in all its forms – must end. Ensuring accountability is key in preventing future attacks.

It is the obligation of OSCE participating States to ensure a safe and secure working environment for all journalists and media actors, thus enabling them to carry out their professional activities independently, both online and offline, without undue interference and without fear of violence and persecution. Such fear could only lead

to self-censorship, and thus neglect the very essence of freedom of opinion and expression, as well as media freedom.

Regretfully, during the past year, throughout the OSCE area, we continued observing the significant surge of serious threats to journalists, which included smear campaigns, physical attacks against journalists and media actors, their arbitrary detention and imprisonment, harassment and intimidation, death threats and even murder. Quite often, the COVID-19 pandemic has also been instrumentalized to exercise politically motivated pressure on them. In recent months, we raised a number of issues of such attacks against journalists and media actors in Belarus, Russia and other OSCE participating States. The EU will continue following all these worrying trends and individual cases closely. We must make sure that those responsible for any attacks against journalists and media actors do not enjoy impunity.

The EU also remains deeply concerned about the fact that female journalists continue being disproportionately targeted, including through the specific threats with regard to their work, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats and violence, including through digital technologies.

The EU fully supports the important work on safety of journalists performed by the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, including the work on countering gender-based attacks against female journalists. In this regard, we welcome the most recent launch of the Safety of Female Journalists Online Resource Guide.

The EU will continue to defend freedom of expression and protect those who make use of this fundamental freedom to keep us informed every day. We provide support and legal assistance to journalists and media actors under threat, including through the EU funded projects such as *Media Freedom Rapid Response*. In the last 12 months, the EU has supported over 425 journalists with emergency grants, temporary relocation, or support to their respective media outlets.

Ensuring safety of journalists and media actors remains one of the EU's priorities. We are strongly committed to continue implementing OSCE Milan Ministerial Council Decision 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists and call on OSCE participating

States to do likewise. In this regard, much more determined actions by all OSCE participating States, both individually and collectively, are needed.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.