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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 11-22 September 2017**

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#### **Working session 1: Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of expression, free media and information**

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Mr./Ms. Chairperson,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Freedom of expression is crucial for our common security and remains a top priority for the European Union. The EU takes this opportunity to warmly welcome the new Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr Harlem Désir, and to thank his team for their excellent continuous work. Mr Désir, freedom of expression is more at danger now than it has been for a long time. This makes your autonomous role and fearless voice all the more important. Your strong and flexible mandate must be preserved and your budget safeguarded.

Regrettably, we see a continued trend toward infringements of freedom of expression and opinion. The EU has raised specific concerns in this regard over the past year in inter alia Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. We once again call on all participating States to fully respect their international commitments, to reverse violations, and to enable rather than restrain independent voices. The EU remains committed to addressing our own shortcomings and working with the RFoM, and call on all participating States to do the same. Let us highlight a few specific situations, where urgent steps need to be taken.

In Budapest in 1994 participating States agreed to hold all those responsible for attacks and harassments against journalists to account. Nevertheless intimidations, threats and attacks on journalists and media workers as well as impunity for such acts continue to have a chilling effect on freedom of the media and free expression in parts of our region, nurturing



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self-censorship and silence and thereby depriving society of an open and informed public debate.

The EU has raised concerns regarding the intimidation of journalists, e.g. those working for the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta following their reporting on human rights violations in Chechnya, the recent deaths of the journalists Dimitry Popkov and Nikolay Andrushchenko, and the disappearance of blogger Stanyslav Aseyev. In Crimea and Sevastopol, illegally annexed by Russia, and in the parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russia-backed separatists, enforced disappearances, harassment and threats of journalists and persons speaking out against the de-facto authorities, contribute to the culture of fear and silence.

Excessive anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation is also used to silence dissenting voices. In Turkey, imprisonments of journalists continue. We are deeply concerned by the forced closure of hundreds of media outlets and the imprisonment of more than 160 journalists, including Die Welt correspondent Deniz Yücel and French journalism student Loup Bureau. We are closely following the indictment against 19 journalists and executives of the Cumhuriyet newspaper. Furthermore, intimidation and detention of journalists in connection with peaceful demonstrations, as was done in Belarus and in the Russian Federation, is unacceptable. Journalists and media workers must be allowed to cover public protests without fear.

We reiterate our deep concern with the recent crackdowns in Azerbaijan, putting bloggers and media workers behind bars after criticizing the authorities. We take note that the head of the Turan press agency, Mehman Aliyev, has been released but we regret that he is still under house arrest. Ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the 'Reporters without borders' World press freedom index, Azerbaijan stands out in the region. Reports of ill-treatment in detention engrave the concern. The situation for freedom of expression and media in Central Asia remains deeply disturbing. We are closely following the media freedom situation in countries of the Western Balkans, where intimidation and harassment of journalists and media workers remains a problem, as well as the lack of independent media. The EU acknowledges



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the willingness of Ukraine to work with the RFoM noting, however, that more needs to be done by the authorities.

Disinformation campaigns continue to distort the media space in the OSCE region, as also identified by EEAS East Strat Com, and continue to be a key tool of Russia's destabilizing actions abroad. In Budapest in 1994 and in Istanbul in 1999 participating States recalled the risks of depriving citizens of a free media, of exploiting media in conflict and of fomenting hatred and tension. We recall that participating States have committed themselves to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression and welcome the work of the RFoM in this regard.

We urge participating States to pay due attention to this phenomenon and take appropriate measures: awareness, media literacy, pluralism and knowledge is the best filter and defense.

In Sofia 2004, participating States agreed to take action to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression. This is a crucial issue today. Internet has to be secure with equal access and inclusiveness for all, as well as being guided by the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In several countries, including the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, the EU sees opposite developments.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward the following recommendations to participating States:

- Engage constructively with the RFoM and make use of expertise and recommendations.
- Respect the RFoM mandate and autonomy and provide the RFoM with the necessary resources to fulfil this mandate
- Abide in good faith by their commitments in the area of Freedom of Expression and free media and safety of journalists, and further strengthen the OSCE commitments in this regard.



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- Take active steps to prevent and respond to violence and harassment against journalists ensuring that all those responsible are brought to justice, paying special attention to gender-based threats on-line and offline.
- Devote special attention to the phenomenon of disinformation campaigns.
- Respect the freedom of expression and refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression.
- Refrain from unduly and disproportionately restricting freedom of speech, online and offline, and prosecuting critics under the guise of fighting extremism or terrorism.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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