



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 22 September - 3 October 2014

EU Statement on Freedom of Expression, Working Session 2

The EU would like to thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) for her presentation and call on her to keep up her excellent work.

Freedom of expression remains a top priority for the EU in OSCE. In May this year, the EU foreign ministers adopted the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline. These guidelines underline the EU's conviction that freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of the media are necessary for an active, engaged and informed citizenry, and that they constitute the essential foundation for democracy, rule of law, peace and stability. They also confirm that freedom of expression applies online as well as offline. It is, therefore, deeply troubling that there are still countries in the OSCE where freedom of expression is being restricted.

As OSCE participating States (pS), we have all agreed to fully implement, in good faith, a strong body of commitments to ensure that every individual's right to freedom of expression and opinion are respected in the entire OSCE area. This right is also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A year ago during the discussion of freedom of expression in this setting, we pointed out that implementation gaps were widening rather than closing. Sadly, as we review the implementation of our OSCE commitments at this HDIM, we see that the trend is one of dramatic deterioration in parts of our region.

This is not something that happens by chance, but is the result of deliberate actions on the part of authorities in several OSCE pS to restrict, and in some cases silence,



EUROPEAN UNION

critical voices. This trend can, and must, be reversed and the EU urges pS to take immediate actions to fully implement our OSCE commitments.

The recommendations to participating States, based on our shared commitments in this area are:

1. Ensure respect for the right of every individual to seek, receive and impart views and information.
2. Ensure media freedom and media pluralism so that individuals can freely choose their sources of information.
3. Ensure that the internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression.
4. Draw on the expertise of the RFoM and her dedicated team and make full use of her reports and recommendations.

Events in the last few months have clearly demonstrated the continued relevance of our OSCE freedom of expression commitments, as an integral component of the OSCE comprehensive security concept. The actions of the Russian Federation and of Russia-backed armed groups in Ukraine include attacks on broadcasting stations and other media outlets, illegal replacement of Ukrainian TV channels with Russian ones, as well as violence, abductions and intimidation against journalists and others who make use of their right to freedom of expression and opinion. **Together these and other actions severely endanger media freedom and contribute to an ongoing information war, which serves to escalate the ongoing crisis.** The EU strongly urges the Russian Federation to immediately put an end to these actions, which are in clear violation of both the letter and the spirit of our freedom of expression and media freedom commitments.



EUROPEAN UNION

In the ongoing crisis, several journalists have lost their lives. The European Union unequivocally condemns these killings, and calls for all those responsible to be brought to justice.

The EU also calls on Ukraine to do its utmost to uphold its media freedom commitments. At the same time, we join the RFoM in welcoming the positive steps that have been taken by Ukraine in the last few months, notably regarding access to information and public service broadcasting.

We have seen worrying trends in several parts of the OSCE region during the last year. In, for example, Azerbaijan and Turkey, speaking out as a journalist, or as an advocate of free expression, is fraught with danger of attack, harassment, legal action, detention or imprisonment. We have seen far too many examples of this in recent months. We have also seen how media outlets, not least those operating online, are under pressure in several countries. Regrettably, this is the case both in Kazakhstan, a previous OSCE Chair, and in Serbia, the incoming OSCE Chair. In this context, the EU welcomes the stated intention of the Serbian government to lead by example, and call for closer cooperation with the RFoM. **We note with deep concern the trend towards a shrinking space for dissenting views within the Russian Federation, and mounting pressure on those who openly disagree with government policies as well as further repressive policies that unduly restrict freedom of expression and the activities of independent media outlets, including those operating online.** Excessive regulation of the internet, amendments to the Information Law targeting bloggers, the use of anti-extremism and anti-separatism legislation are some examples. As the RFoM, the EU calls for a rigorous investigation of the death of journalist Timur Kushaev.

Arbitrary blocking of social media sites as well as other internet services is a growing problem in our region. Regrettably, it has occurred in Turkey, as well as in other pS. This clearly goes against our commitment to facilitate “freer and wider



EUROPEAN UNION

dissemination of information of all kinds”.

One should underline that the EU and its member states do not have spotless track records either. As all pS, we have our shortcomings. The EU is committed to improving and believes that a free and open public debate is of crucial importance as we work to enhance our laws and practices. We stand ready to consider recommendations and engage on issues, and expect others to do the same.

Before concluding, the EU wishes to once again underline the great importance it places on the participation and input of non-governmental organizations in the work of the OSCE. This openness is one of the added values of our organization. **Civil society actors can play an important role as a watchdog and partner in our efforts to ensure full implementation of human dimension commitments. In order to preserve this added value, it is of fundamental importance that participating States don't try to limit the independence of these civil society actors or instrumentalize them for political aims.**

The Candidate Countries, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

* Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.