



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement in reply to the address by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report.

We highly appreciate the work done by the Representative and her Office and can assure Ms Mijatović and other participating States that those Member States which feature in the report will study the comments and recommendations carefully.

Earlier this week, we had an excellent opportunity to discuss important issues relating to freedom on the Internet in Dublin. We would like to thank the Irish Chairmanship for making this issue a priority and for organising the conference, which we expect will be thoroughly followed up. We intend to continue the discussions here in Vienna and consider deliverables at the Dublin Ministerial Council in the field of media freedom a top priority for this year.

We would like to once again underline that fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and its corollary freedom of the media, apply equally online as they do offline. Participating States have committed to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum. Access to the Internet can only be restricted in exceptional situations and then only in full accordance with relevant

provisions of international law. Therefore, we are concerned by blocked websites in some participating States, including in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkey, as well as one partially blocked website in Kyrgyzstan. We regret that freedom of expression continues to be extensively limited in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In this context, we also wish to express our concern about a number of cyber attacks against media which have occurred in the last reporting period, and call on the participating States concerned to thoroughly investigate the cases.

Considering the importance of ensuring freedom on the Internet, we would like to take this opportunity to welcome the upcoming 14th Central Asia Media Conference which will take place in Ashgabat on 5-6 July, as well as other upcoming regional media conferences, during which the participants will have an opportunity to discuss issues relating to online media.

Ensuring that journalists can work without fear of violence or harassment is key to free media. Sadly, also in the last reporting period we have seen numerous attacks against journalists which might have a chilling effect on the media climate. These include cases in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Ukraine. We hope that all of these cases will soon be resolved and the perpetrators brought to justice.

Detention of individuals for making use of their freedom of expression is another matter of serious concern. Although we were pleased to learn of the decision to parole social media activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu, we remain concerned about several other cases in Azerbaijan. We recall our statement following the publication of the updated version of the study of imprisoned journalists in Turkey in April. Lately, we have also seen several cases of detention of journalists in Belarus. We agree with the Representative that the President should end the repressive policy toward the media and that media freedom could only be achieved in Belarus if all unfair convictions and pending charges against journalists were annulled.

During the past months, several members of the press have been prevented from or punished for covering public events. We would like to remind all participating States that journalists play an important role in reporting on matters of public interest and have a right to report from scenes of protests and demonstrations without being obstructed from doing their work. Authorities have a responsibility to guarantee their safety and protection during such events.

In conclusion, we would like to once again thank the Representative and her able team for their excellent work and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia* and the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.