



**EUROPEAN UNION**

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**EU statement on World Press Freedom Day**

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This week, we celebrate World Press Freedom Day. This is a day for all of us to reiterate the commitments we have undertaken, in the OSCE as well as in other fora, to keep our societies open, our media free and our citizens well informed by a genuine public discourse, where all voices, including critical ones, can be heard. The High Representative Federica Mogherini on Tuesday issued a declaration to this effect, on behalf of the European Union, that has been distributed to all of you. We also welcome the Finlandia Declaration adopted at this year's UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference in Helsinki.

In the OSCE, freedom of expression and of the media are longstanding key priorities of the EU. Today, as our organization is challenged by crisis and conflict, this priority is more relevant than ever. Implementation of our human dimension commitments, including on media freedom and free expression, is essential to democracy and development, as well as to our common security. Free, diverse and independent media are essential in any society to promote and protect freedom of opinion and expression and other human rights. By facilitating the free flow of information and ideas on matters of general interest, and by ensuring transparency and accountability, independent media constitute one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. Without freedom of expression and freedom of the media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.

Regrettably, in much of the OSCE region, the trend is far from positive. For example, we see the Russian Federation further increasing repression of

independent voices, while challenging the very concept of free expression through state-driven disinformation and propaganda. We have, on several occasions urged Russia to change course. Safety of journalists remains a serious problem: we note in this regard that the perpetrators of the 9 March attack against a group of journalists and human rights defenders in Ingushetia have not yet been identified, and call on the relevant authorities to ensure that all those responsible, both perpetrators and instigators, are brought to justice. We are also closely following proposals for amendments to the Information Law, passed by the Duma in a first reading on April 19 that would make internet search engines and news aggregators legally liable for reproduced content that they disseminate. This could have serious repercussions on access to information and media freedom. We call on Russia to carefully consider the effect of the proposed changes. In the illegally annexed Crimea, a crackdown on freedom of the media and free expression continues. Last month, several journalists from Crimea were detained by the de facto authorities, interrogated and even faced travel bans for their activities. Therefore, we join the RFoM in her call to stop the practice of silencing journalists in Crimea.

Also in Turkey, a further deterioration of freedom of expression and media freedom has taken place in recent weeks. We continue to closely follow the trials of Can Dündar, Editor in Chief of daily newspaper Cumhuriyet, and the newspaper's Ankara representative Erdem Gül, and we reiterate our call for the charges against these two journalists to be dropped. There are numerous other examples of intimidation of critical and independent voices, through lawsuits, attacks and other forms of political pressure on journalists and social media users. We underline once again that full respect for human rights, including the right to free expression and freedom of the media is a prerequisite for lasting security. We call on Turkey to heed the advice of the RFoM and engage with the office, including through direct dialogue.

The European Union congratulates Azeri investigative journalist Khadija Ismaylova on having been awarded this year's UNESCO/Guillermo Cano

World Press Freedom Prize on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. Her imprisonment remains an issue of deep concern for the European Union. We recall the pardoning by President Ilham Aliyev on 17 March of a number of journalists, bloggers and freedom of expression advocates as a long awaited positive step. We call on Azerbaijan to take concrete action to improve the situation for freedom of expression in the country.

There are many other cases in our region that could be brought up in this context: we are concerned about internet and press freedom in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and continued repressive environments for free speech in much of Central Asia. Further steps should be taken to better protect journalists in Armenia. Several countries in the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia, benefit from following the advice of the RFoM, in order to strengthen and deepen reform efforts. We join the Representative on Freedom of the Media in her concern about the case of the journalist and producer Savik Shuster in Ukraine whose work permit was recently challenged.

Knowing that we must all remain alert to challenges in the field of freedom of the media, we welcome the engagement of the RFoM in European Union member states: this helps us live up to our commitments. We stand firmly with the Representative on Freedom of the Media as an institution and fully support its mandate. To that end, we welcome the intention of the Chairmanship to appoint a new RFoM by the end of this year. We congratulate Ms Dunja Mijatovic on having been awarded the Concordia Prize for press freedom on the occasion of this year's World Press Freedom day.

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 ICELAND align themselves with this statement.

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