



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 999 Vienna, 8 May 2014

EU Statement on the Occasion of World Press Freedom Day

The European Union would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the declaration by the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, issued on 3 May 2014 in Brussels:

“On the 21st anniversary of World Press Freedom day, the EU reiterates that free, diverse and independent media constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society by facilitating the free flow of information and ideas, and by ensuring transparency and accountability.

The EU calls upon all governments to abide by international norms and to put an end to the intimidation, harassment, censorship and arbitrary detention of journalists and to impunity. Efforts to protect journalists should not be limited to those formally recognised as such, but should also cover support staff and others who use new media to reach a mass audience.

Technological innovations in information technology and communications have created new ways of promoting freedom of expression but have also brought new challenges. The EU is firmly opposed to any unjustified restrictions on the internet and other new media. All human rights that exist offline must also be protected online, in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The EU will soon adopt the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline. The aim of those guidelines is to address unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression, promote media freedom and provide valuable guidance to EU officials and staff across the globe.”

Mr Chairperson, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, the European Union would like to commend those throughout the OSCE area who exercise their right to freedom of expression in the face of restrictions that violate our common media freedom commitments. We urge all participating States to uphold these commitments, and take renewed steps towards their full implementation.

We take this opportunity to express our strong appreciation and support for the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, and her team for their tireless work in advocating and promoting media freedom and freedom of expression, as well as assisting us, the participating States, in meeting our commitments. We continue to firmly stand by the Representative on Freedom of the Media in the exercise of her mandate, and welcome the recent event on Open Journalism, as well as the release of the updated OSCE Guidelines on Safety of Journalists - both very topical issues today.

Ensuring freedom of the media, a free flow of information and safety for journalists is all the more important in a crisis situation. Currently, we see a wave of violence, abductions and threats targeting journalists in Eastern Ukraine, following similar developments in Crimea. The whereabouts of some of the abducted journalists are still unknown. We see the illegal taking over of broadcasting stations and TV channels, and the use of Russian state owned media for propaganda purposes, creating a climate of fear and hatred, and thereby contributing to an escalation of the situation. Internally in Russia, we see the space for free media and free expression shrinking, as Russian aggression abroad make Russia increasingly isolated internationally. Recent

amendments to the Information Law, including restrictive requirements for bloggers, as well as the new amendments to the penal code, are extremely worrying examples of this. We strongly urge the Russian Federation to abide by its commitments and bring its laws and practices into accordance with international standards.

Mr Chairperson, freedom of expression and freedom of the media constitute cornerstones of a democratic society. We reaffirm our determination to continue to promote freedom of expression and freedom of the media, online as well as offline, including safety of journalists, within the OSCE area.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.