

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council N° 1184
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**EU Statement on the occasion of World Press Freedom
Day**

Today on World Press Freedom Day the EU celebrates all journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and other media actors who make their voices heard despite threats, violence and restrictions. We reiterate our steadfast commitment to respect, protect and promote freedom of expression and media freedom, online as well as offline. Freedom of expression serves as an enabler to other human rights and is a cornerstone of democracy. Without free, diverse and independent media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible. A statement by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day has been distributed.

The EU welcomes this year's global theme of *Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and The Rule of Law*. From an OSCE perspective, this theme is regrettably very timely, as the watchdog function of the media is challenged by many governments. This is all the more concerning, as the role of media to foster transparency and accountability through critical reporting is of key importance within the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security.

Today is a day to pay tribute to those journalists and other media actors who have lost their lives, been imprisoned or otherwise suffered unjust consequences for exercising their right to freedom of expression and in many cases, their profession. We deplore the trend of threats and hatred against female journalists, noting that gender-based harassment distorts the media landscape and threatens the future of free press. We reiterate that impunity for all crimes against journalists and other media actors must end, also because of the detrimental chilling effect it creates. We regret that, in spite of their international obligations, many participating States fall short of promoting a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their

work independently and without undue interference. In this regard, we note that according to Reporters without Borders, who just released the Press Freedom Index for 2018, press freedom in Russia and Turkey is on levels that are without precedent in decades. The EU expresses its concern about the recurrence of deliberately targeted disinformation and propaganda campaigns from Russia, which affect not only other participating States, but also Russia's own civil society and the freedom and independence of the media in Russia. We share the concerns expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media about the prison sentences issued on 25 April to the majority of the defendants in the Cumhuriyet trial in Turkey. Many other recent examples could be brought up in this context: We are concerned that Azeri journalist Afghan Mukhtarli had his appeal denied by a court on 24 April, noting the reports that one of his lawyers was suspended the day before the hearing; we are also concerned about the temporary detention of Ratel.kz and Forbes Kazakhstan staff and the blocking of the Ratel.kz webpage in Kazakhstan, the use of defamation lawsuits to levy disproportionate fines against journalists and media outlets in Kyrgyzstan, while acknowledging recent positive steps, as well as about many other cases throughout the OSCE area.

On World Press Freedom Day all participating States should scrutinize their implementation of the OSCE commitments related to freedom of expression and the media. The European Union and its Member States are not immune to problems and shortcomings in this field, including with respect to the safety of journalists. We were all shocked by the recent murders of journalists in some of the EU Member States. In advancing the situation for media within the EU, Member States seek, along with strong support to full investigation of the cases, to engage fully with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and deeply appreciate these exchanges.

The Representative on Freedom of the Media is a unique resource of utmost value to participating States. The EU stands firmly by the institution, including the mandate of the Representative. We encourage all participating States to engage with the Representative, to heed the concerns he raises and to draw on the expertise of the office, so that implementation of the OSCE commitments related to freedom of expression and media freedom can be improved.

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, 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.