



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council 1472
Vienna, 9 May 2024**

EU Statement on World Press Freedom Day

1. World Press Freedom Day provides an opportunity to reflect on and highlight the indispensable role that free, diverse and independent media plays in society. Independent, fact-based journalism helps protect our democracies by exposing injustices, holding leaders to account and allowing citizens to make informed decisions. In 2024, with elections taking place in over 60 countries worldwide, the work of journalists and other media actors is more significant than ever. On this year's World Press Freedom Day, we honour their work and courage.
2. The global theme for this year's World Press Freedom Day is "Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis". We recognise that journalists covering environmental and climate stories often face a range of serious threats and attacks, facing additional risk factors because of the work they do.
3. All OSCE participating States have agreed that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is at the core of the organisation's comprehensive concept of security. Central to this is media freedom, freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, which are key priorities for the EU at home and abroad. The EU firmly condemns all acts of violence, including threats, against journalists and other media actors for exercising their profession and their right to freedom of expression, whether perpetrated by states, organised groups or individuals. There must be no impunity for such crimes, no matter where they take place.

4. Women journalists and media actors face an increasing number of attacks, both online and offline, and are subjected to disproportional and specific threats globally.
5. Journalists and media actors reporting from armed conflict zones must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. Journalists and media actors continue to be at risk on a daily basis while reporting on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The most recent report under the Moscow Mechanism confirms that journalists are among the thousands of civilian Ukrainians arbitrarily detained by Russia. Perpetrators must and will be held accountable according to international law. We call on Russia to respect international law and to comply with its international commitments, including to implement without delay the recommendations of the report.
6. In Russia, authorities have continued to increase the systematic internal repression by cracking down on independent media, as well as opposition politicians, civil society organisations, and other critical voices with the use of repressive legislation and politically motivated prison sentences. We join the RFoM in calling on Russian authorities to fully respect and act in line with OSCE commitments on media freedom.
7. We reiterate our deep concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and our strong condemnation of the continuing persecution and intimidation campaigns against all segments of Belarusian society, including but not limited to journalists and media actors, human rights defenders, and civil society representatives. Recent sentences, as highlighted by RFoM and others, deepen intimidation, and devastate media actors and their families.
8. We encourage all participating States, and in light of recent human rights and media freedom indexes, particularly Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to take steps to fully respect their OSCE commitments in this regard.
9. The RFoM has expressed her deep concern about the arrests of media actors in Azerbaijan. The EU calls on Azerbaijan to release those imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights and to ensure free and unhindered space for independent journalism and freedom of expression.

10. In Kyrgyzstan, the recent adoption of legislation on 'Non-Commercial Organisations', known as the 'Foreign Representatives' legislation, is a worrying development.
11. In Türkiye, the EU is concerned about the targeting of journalists, civil society representatives and others, including with detentions, recalling the concerns expressed by the RFoM.
12. Now more than ever, we must take decisive action to ensure that the media can operate in viable political, economic and legal conditions. At home, the EU has taken a significant step to this end with the adoption of the European Media Freedom Act. This landmark legislation seeks to enhance editorial freedom, protect journalistic sources, and improve transparency in media ownership in the EU. By defending media freedom, we protect not just our right to know, but our very ability to shape a future guided by truth and accountability.
13. Public denunciation of disinformation and fake news is one of the main levers in the fight against disinformation attacks. In this context, particular attention should be given to disinformation campaigns, including those aimed at discrediting EU's enlargement policy and spreading misinformation both in EU Member States and candidate countries.
14. We call on all OSCE participating states to fully abide by their OSCE commitments and international obligations related to media freedom, and we reiterate the EU's firm commitment to do the same. We also reiterate our strong support for the RFoM's mandate and work.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.