



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1245 Vienna, 31 October 2019

EU Statement on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

Impunity for crimes against journalists must end. Democracy cannot live without free, diverse and independent media. Journalists and media actors across the globe hold states, government officials and corporations accountable for their actions. They uncover abuses of power, shine light on corruption and human rights violations, and question received opinion, often putting themselves at risk of intimidation, violence and death. Therefore, the EU attaches the highest priority to the safety of journalists and other media actors including in digital contexts and strongly calls for the continued implementation of the Ministerial Council decision reached in Milan 2018 on this topic.

The MC decision from Milan calls on all pS to take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists by ensuring accountability as a key element in preventing future attacks. However, this is contrasted by our region's many cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, intimidation and violence against reporters, bloggers and other media actors. The perpetrators of these attacks often act with total impunity. Freedom of expression, including the safety of journalists, lies at the very core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. There is a clear link between democratic, open, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our common and comprehensive security and stability, and free expression and free media.

Fighting impunity of crimes against journalists is indispensable for democratic

societies. In connection to the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against journalists, we pay tribute to all those journalists around the world who lost their lives and suffered attacks, as well as to those who are taking up the work of their colleagues who can no longer pursue their investigations. The assassinations of investigative journalists that we have seen in the EU demonstrate that no region of the world is immune to this. These despicable crimes need to be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted.

The EU fully supports the important work on safety of journalists performed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, including the work on countering gender-based attacks against women journalists. As recognized in the Ministerial Council decision last year, women journalists face specific threats with regards to their work, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats and violence, including through digital technologies.

We note with great concern that at the same time as those who conducted, paid for or orchestrated attacks against journalists go free, media actors face criminal charges for using their freedom of expression, creating an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship among media actors and the public at large. In this regard we echo the Representative's calls on the Russian Federation to drop the criminal charges against journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva, who is now facing seven years in prison on highly questionable grounds, and we align ourselves with his position that her statements have nothing to do with justification of terrorism. Furthermore, we echo the call of the RFoM to carefully review the sentence against the Russian blogger Vladislav Sinitsa. Five years in prison for a tweet is far too much. Moreover, we share the Representative's concerns about the treatment of journalists covering the election-related protests in Moscow this summer. On 29 July, at least 15 journalists were assaulted, detained or had their equipment damaged by police while covering the demonstrations, and 14 journalists were detained on 3 August.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our concerns about the persistence of intimidations and death threats directed against journalists within the OSCE area. We are particularly concerned about the situation of impunity in Russia where according to the RFoM report of 2017, there were 171 cases of killed journalists of which 153 remained unsolved (1992-2017). In this context, we recall some

unresolved cases mentioned by the RFoM. We share the RFoM's concerns about the intimidation and death threats directed at journalists with the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta on 17 and 18 October last year. We reiterate that these incidents must be fully investigated and the journalists' safety ensured. We echo his repeated calls on the Russian authorities in connection with the anniversaries of the killing of Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya, to intensify their efforts to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists, including Paul Klebnikov, Natalya Estemirova, Khadzhimurad Kamalov and Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev amongst many others.

We expect that the issues we raised will be addressed during the upcoming conference on freedom of the media and safety of journalists to be held on 6 November in Moscow, organized by the RFoM with the support of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The EU also remains deeply concerned about the situation for journalists in Turkey. We urge the Turkish authorities to heed to the Representative's calls to urgently reverse the course of media freedom violations, and to release all journalists and media actors imprisoned for their work. In this context, we take positive note of the recent release of Meltem Oktay and Uğur Akgül. Previously in this Council, we have raised many worrying examples of physical assaults against journalists in Turkey, notably the cases of Sabahattin Önkibar, Hakan Denizli, Ergin Çevik, İdris Özyol, and Yavuz Selim Demirağ. The most recent attack took place in August against journalist Levent Uysal who was shot in the leg. The EU fully agrees with the RFoM that impunity for attacks against journalists is unacceptable, that the Turkish authorities need to do their utmost to ensure safe working conditions for journalists, and that public condemnation at the highest level is crucial. We call on Turkey to fully implement all OSCE commitments and international obligations related to freedom of expression and media freedom, including on the safety of journalists.

In Milan 2018, the Ministerial Council noted with concern the climate of impunity that prevails when violent attacks committed against journalists remain unpunished, and recognized the role of governments, legislators and the judiciary in enabling a safe working environment online and offline and ensuring safety of journalists by, inter alia, publicly condemning and bringing to justice all those responsible for crimes against journalists. For our own part, the EU remains committed to engaging with the

RFoM, and calls on all participating States to make use of his expertise in order to fully implement their OSCE and other relevant commitments.

Active steps must be taken to promote safety for journalists and other media actors, enabling them to carry out their tasks independently, without undue interference and without fear of violence and persecution, including during elections and demonstrations. Considering the success in adopting the text on safety of journalists in 2018 in Milan and in view of the upcoming Ministerial Council in Bratislava, the EU looks forward to engaging in discussion on how to cooperate further in this field.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA align themselves with this statement.

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