



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement on freedom of expression in Russia

The EU deeply regrets that the worrying trend with regard to freedom of expression in Russia continues.

The EU is concerned about the attack on Russian journalist Dmitry Polyagin, who was brutally beaten by at least two assailants with metal bars on 12 April. We echo the call by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on Russian authorities to swiftly and thoroughly investigate this criminal act and bring the perpetrators and masterminds to justice.

Further, the EU is shocked by the death of Russian investigative journalist Maksim Borodin, on 15 April following a fall from his fifth-floor apartment. The EU echoes the Representative on Freedom of the Media and calls for a full, transparent and independent investigation by Russian authorities into the circumstances of the death of Maksim Borodin. We note that the majority of killings of journalists in Russia remain unsolved, which further weakens the media freedom in the country.

Moreover, on 13 April a Russian court ruled to block the Telegram messaging and social networking application, which reportedly is used by 9.5 million Russians and has a focus on user privacy, after the company refused to comply with the requests to give Russia's Federal Security Service access to its users' encrypted messages.

In Copenhagen 1990 all participating States reaffirmed the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. Encryption and anonymity provide the privacy and security necessary for the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in the digital age. Echoing the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the EU calls on the Russian authorities to reconsider the decision to block Telegram and to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment.

The EU further notes that the court decision on Telegram comes just one day after the State Duma passed, in the first reading, a draft bill targeting social networks. We share the concerns of the Representative on Freedom of the Media that the proposed changes have a clear potential to limit free speech and freedom of the media in Russia, and fall short of international law.

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 countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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