

Spanish Presidency of the European Union

OSCE Permanent Council No. 796
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EU statement in response to the report of Mr. Miklós Haraszti, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

The European Union welcomes Mr. Haraszti to the Permanent Council for the last time in his role of Representative on Freedom of the Media and thanks him for his latest, and sadly his last, report.

Throughout his six years as Representative, Mr. Haraszti has been a fearless champion for media freedom. He has generously praised and welcomed positive developments in the participating States. Equally, he has been measured in commenting on actions and events which have impacted negatively on media freedom, but he has always tempered his criticism with offers of assistance and support from his office.

We have valued in particular Mr. Haraszti's dispassionate exercise of his mandate both east and west of Vienna. In this regard, the Member States of the European Union have also benefited from his scrutiny and this latest report has both good and bad news as concerns developments in the EU. As ever, we value Mr. Haraszti's

opinion and we would like to assure him that those EU countries which feature in the report will study his comments carefully and will continue to cooperate with his office.

Turning now to the details of this report, many of the developments have been the subject of separate EU statements to the Permanent Council.

The EU is shocked and saddened that attacks on journalists continue unabated in Kyrgyzstan. We recall in particular our statement to the Permanent Council on 21 January following the murder of Gennady Pavlyuk in Almaty. As Mr. Haraszi has reported, the judgement handed down last week concerning the murder of Almazbek Tashiev, amounted to practically an acquittal of the accused, who were uniformed officers. The EU shares Mr. Haraszi's sentiments on the need to address the climate of violence and impunity with regard to the media in Kyrgyzstan and to bring those responsible to justice. This problem must be confronted if Kyrgyzstan is to comply with its OSCE commitments on media freedom.

We have commented on the situation with regard to media freedom in Azerbaijan on a number of occasions, most recently on 10 February, and our concerns about various cases of harassment against independent journalists and their persecution on questionable grounds remain.

We welcome Mr. Haraszi's initiative to commission a legal analysis of internet legislation in Belarus and, again with reference to an EU

statement on 10 February, we encourage the Belarusian authorities to avail of the advice offered by the Office of the Representative.

We continue to be concerned by the ongoing incarceration of Dilmurad Saiid and Solijon Abdurakhmanov in Uzbekistan and we urge the Uzbek authorities to review their cases without delay.

The EU agrees with the assessment of Mr. Haraszti that the initiation of a number of lawsuits in Tajikistan is an attempt to censor media organisations who have sought to report on allegations of corruption and other wrongdoings by public authorities. We urge the Tajik authorities to review their policies taking the Representative's guidelines concerning libel suits into consideration.

With regard to the Russian Federation, which we have addressed at numerous occasions, we have taken note of the developments highlighted by Mr. Haraszti and will continue to pay close attention to the situation of media freedom.

Mr. Haraszti has hesitated to give his assessment of the overall situation with regard to media freedom in the OSCE region. However, the EU remains deeply concerned by the deterioration we have witnessed not only in the period under review but indeed by the negative trends evident for some years now. It is therefore a matter of profound regret that last year's Ministerial Council was not able to agree on a decision on Media Freedom which could have reminded participating States of our ongoing obligation to implement our OSCE commitments on media freedom and could have addressed the new challenges and opportunities we face at a time of rapid technological development.

The Corfu Process offers us another opportunity to review our existing commitments and to consider where they might be enhanced and improved. In this regard, media freedom, and freedom of expression in general should be a priority area deserving of our attention. How to adapt our commitments to the Internet age, how to enhance pluralism in media ownership, how to safeguard our journalists so that they are free to report without fears for their livelihoods or their lives, how to free them from the threat of criminal prosecution for defamation that impairs their ability to report fully on all issues of public interest – these are challenges we face in the immediate period ahead. The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security including human rights and fundamental freedoms leave no room for doubt that media freedom will remain a focus of our attention.

Finally, this is a time of departure. We take this opportunity to thank Mr. Haraszi and his excellent staff for their dedication. We wish Mr. Haraszi every success in his future endeavours and, knowing his fierce commitment to media freedom, we have no doubt but that we shall hear from him again at some stage in the future.

Los países candidatos CROACIA* y la ANTIGUA REPÚBLICA YUGOSLAVA DE MACEDONIA*, los países del Proceso de Estabilización y Asociación y los países candidatos potenciales, ALBANIA, MONTENEGRO y SERBIA, el país de la Asociación Europea de Libre Comercio y miembro del Espacio Económico Europeo, ISLANDIA, se suman a esta declaración.

*Croacia y la Antigua República Yugoslava de Macedonia siguen perteneciendo al proceso de Estabilización y Asociación.