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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

Expert Workshop on PPPs: Engaging the Media in Countering Terrorism Vienna, 19-20 October 2009

EU Opening Statement

The EU welcomes the opportunity offered by this workshop to explore the role of the media in countering terrorism. We thank the organisers for preparing a very interesting programme, in order to raise this issue in the framework of the OSCE.

At the outset of our discussions, we wish to strongly reaffirm the importance of respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in all counter-terrorism actions. In this regard, we recall that the strategic commitment of the EU's counter-terrorism strategy is "to combat terrorism globally while respecting human rights, and make Europe safer, allowing its citizens to live in an area of freedom, security and justice".

We have become increasingly concerned by the trend on the part of some OSCE participating States to cite security - including counter-terrorism - reasons for controlling access to the internet and censorship of its content. We would therefore like to restate – in line

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with existing OSCE commitments on fundamental freedoms - our firm belief that combating terrorism should not provide a pretext to constrain freedom of expression or to impair the independence of the media.

The EU acknowledges the important contribution that the media can make in countering terrorism and providing a forum for a discussion on tolerance. We recall the decision of the Madrid Ministerial Council in December 2007, which recognised the role of media and educational institutions in encouraging pluralistic debate with a view to promoting ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity and countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism. We fully support the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media and the ODIHR together with the Field Operations in promoting these objectives.

The EU encourages public-private partnerships with the media in countering terrorism. As recognised in the Madrid decision, these partnerships are particularly useful in addressing the factors that contribute to radicalisation and recruitment to terrorist activities. Both traditional mass media and the growing number of other modern channels of communication offer endless opportunities for people from different communities and backgrounds to share their life stories, views and opinions.

The media can be a key tool in fostering an environment which promotes inter-cultural dialogue and which permits tolerance and mutual dialogue to flourish. Young people who have free access to the internet for example - who have been encouraged to seek out information from all sources and who have been given first hand

insights into other peoples' lives - are less easily swayed by the arguments of those who would draw them into a destructive spiral of extremism and violence. Moreover, the media can significantly support national efforts to disseminate information among civil society regarding potential terrorist threats or measures of civil protection in the case of terrorist incidents.

In conclusion, we as EU Member States look forward to exploring this topic in depth over the next two days. We would like to assure you that we will participate actively and constructively in our national capacities to what we hope will be fruitful and open discussions.