

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE  
REPRESENTATIVE ON THE FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA  
Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 5 July 2018

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

I join others in welcoming the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Mr Harlem Désir, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his impressive and useful report.

Freedom of expression is the foundation on which all other democratic freedoms rest. Freedom of the media is one specific and important instance of this freedom. We must safeguard and promote it tirelessly and constantly throughout. Since his last report to the Permanent Council, in November of last year, Mr. Désir has raised issues with 37 participating States. The activities continue to demonstrate the professional, watchful scrutiny with which the Representative and his office operate.

Interventions with participating States form the core, but is only one part, of the activities of the RFoM. Projects and various activities complement the monitoring efforts and interventions. I should like to highlight the 5<sup>th</sup> South East Europe Media Conference, which took place in May and was supported by Norway. The conference was a successful result of co-operation between the RFoM and the OSCE field operations in the Western Balkans. We encourage participating States in south-eastern Europe to study the conclusions from the conference closely, and work alongside journalists and editors to implement its recommendations.

Also in May, the RFoM was signatory to a "Joint Declaration on Media Independence and Diversity in the Digital Age". Free and independent media underpin any vibrant democracy. States are responsible for ensuring a safe and enabling working environment for journalists and editors. Women journalists and media workers are particularly vulnerable to harassment and violence. The underrepresentation of women in the media sector, and as journalistic sources, is a persistent problem and a hindrance to media independence and diversity. The planned update of the RFoM's *Handbook on Safety of Journalists* is an opportunity to further integrate a gender perspective and address the specific challenges faced by female journalists. We call on participating States to continue work with the Representative on the Freedom of the Media to safeguard and strengthen free and pluralistic media.

The freedom of expression, the freedom of the media and the safety of journalists are key priorities for Norway. We support the development of laws and institutions that safeguard the independence of the media, combat censorship and promote public access to information. Therefore, we strongly support the work of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and thank him for his efforts. As Norway stated in November: his unbiased, cooperative and professional approach shows us that this support is well placed.