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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 19 - 30 September 2016**

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#### **Working session 6: Fundamental Freedoms I, including address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

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Madam/Mr. Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The right to freedom of expression and opinion, as well as its corollary freedom of the media, remain a top priority for the European Union, including in our OSCE work. We therefore closely follow developments in other OSCE participating States. Regrettably, over the last year, the worrying trend towards less respect for and protection of freedom of expression and opinion has deepened and in several cases, OSCE and other international commitments are increasingly being violated. There is a clear link between open, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our joint and comprehensive security and stability, and free expression and free media. Today, we will focus on three key areas that we consider to be of particular concern:

In several countries, legal restrictions shrink the space for dissenting voices and open debate. Persecution of those who criticize government policies takes many forms, but excessive anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation is often used to silence those who do nothing but use their right to freedom of expression. The EU has over the last year raised several examples of this in the Russian Federation, Turkey and Tajikistan. The situation in illegally annexed Crimea is unacceptable. We remain concerned also about the implications of new legislative developments in Russia, including amendments to the information law and other recent legislative steps that have the potential to stifle basic human rights such as freedom of speech and expression.



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Disinformation campaigns continue to distort the media space in the OSCE region, and continue to be a key aspect of Russia's destabilizing actions in Eastern Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea. Especially where the space for free debate is limited, such disinformation campaigns risk having serious impacts and consequences. We warmly welcome the attention paid to this issue by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and repeat that the phenomenon of disinformation campaigns deserves special attention of all OSCE participating States.

Safety of journalists is another area, where serious action is needed. Allowing journalists, including media actors and citizen reporters to act independently and without undue interference online and offline not only requires safeguards of editorial independence, but effective investigation and prosecution when journalists are attacked. While some positive steps have been taken, such as strengthened legal protections in Ukraine and enhanced mechanisms to fight impunity in Serbia, more work is needed in those countries, as well as in the wider Western Balkans. The situation of journalists in the Russian Federation remains alarming for the EU. The EU encourages Turkey to improve freedom of speech in line with the European Council and the European Union guidelines for human rights. While the release on probation of Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismaylova in May was a positive step, we remain deeply concerned as other journalists and bloggers are still detained and new measures recently have been taken against those advocating freedom of expression and opinion in Azerbaijan.

Several other cases and issues could be brought up here, and in several countries in Central Asia the situation is dire, and has been so for a long time. OSCE participating States, however, have an invaluable resource in the tireless Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic and her team. We must all work to preserve and strengthen this institution.

### Recommendations:

Our key recommendation to all participating states is to, in good faith, ensure the full implementation of all freedom of expression related OSCE commitments, as well as other



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international obligations, to reverse existing violations and to support, preserve and cooperate fully with the RFoM.

Thank you.

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 country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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