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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 16 - 27 September 2019

EU statement – Working Session 2: Fundamental Freedoms I (continued), including address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media: Freedom of expression, free media and information

Mr. Moderator,

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

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, remains a top priority for the European Union, including in our OSCE work. Attacks and restrictions that target journalists and other media actors are not only a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but a threat against our common security. It is crucial that states live up to their international obligations and OSCE commitments, first and foremost to refrain from interference and censorship and to ensure a favourable environment for inclusive and pluralistic public debate, both offline and in digital contexts.

In light of the negative trend for freedom of expression and media freedom in much of the OSCE region, the monitoring and assistance by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media are more important than ever. His autonomous role and fearless voice are direly needed to provide early warning and rapid response when states fail to implement their commitments. We fully support the work of the Representative and his able team. The strong and flexible mandate of the Representative must be preserved, and his budget safeguarded.

Over the last year, the EU has repeatedly raised media freedom concerns such as safety of journalists and undue restrictions, often joining the calls of the Representative. With staggering numbers of journalists in detention and pre-trial detention, the situation for media freedom in Turkey remains deeply worrying. Many trials and sentences raise serious questions about the state of rule of law and the respect for human rights, including cases linked to the media outlets Cumhuriyet, Zaman (now closed) and Özgür Gündem (now closed). The EU has



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also voiced concern about the shrinking democratic space for dissenting voices in Russia, including new restrictive legislation targeting both online and traditional media as well as cases of pressure on independent media actors. One example is the record-high fines against The New Times, which followed an interview by the magazine's chief editor with opposition politician Aleksey Navalny. In the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, illegally annexed by Russia, and in the part of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russia-backed armed formations, enforced disappearances, harassment and threats of journalists and persons speaking out against the de facto authorities, contribute to the culture of fear, silence and self-censorship. We again call for the immediate release of Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseev reportedly held in non-government-controlled Donetsk. The EU also recalls its concerns with regard to pressure and imprisonment of media actors in Azerbaijan, such as the sentence in March against Anar Mammadov, while the presidential pardonings in March were a positive step.

Challenges to media freedom can be found throughout the OSCE region, and we are grateful to civil society and the journalistic community for sounding the alarm, noting also their contributions to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media who is tasked to collect and receive requests, suggestions and comments from relevant NGOs. We will always study carefully all recommendations by the Representative directed at EU Member States. We take seriously the commitment, made by all participating States, to cooperate fully with him.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward the following recommendations to participating States:

- Fully respect their international obligations and commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom, in particular to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment so that journalists and other media actors may perform their work independently and without undue interference.
- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.



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- Respect the mandate and autonomy of the Representative and provide him with the necessary resources to fulfil the mandate.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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