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The informal OSCE Group of Friends on #SafetyofJournalists



STATEMENT

**BY THE INFORMAL GROUP OF FRIENDS OF SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE
REPRESENTATIVE ON FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA
AT THE 1478TH MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

13th June 2024

**Delivered (in French) by the Permanent Representative of France to the OSCE,
Ambassador Fatène Benhabylès-Foeth**

Madam Chair,

I make this statement on behalf of the Informal Group of Friends of the Safety of Journalists, which consists of the following participating states: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and my own country, France.

First of all, we would like to thank you, Mrs Ribeiro, for the exceptional quality of your work and our very intense cooperation during these three and a half years as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. The quality of your reports and your firm and vocal commitment to media freedom, freedom of expression, democracy and security are greatly appreciated by our delegations.

The freedom of the media and the safety of journalists constitute commitments on the part of the participating States; they are nevertheless increasingly threatened in the OSCE area as evidenced by your latest biannual report. Our delegations note with worry the continuing deterioration of media freedom in some participating States. As you note in your report, national security concerns are legitimate, but we note with deep concern that such grounds are used by some governments only as a pretext to suppress opposition voices relayed by the independent

media and as a way to strengthen state control over information. We fully share your view that media freedom is an integral part of our security, not adverse to it.

Madam Chair,

As we all know, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has a direct and particularly serious impact on media freedom and the safety of journalists. Since the beginning of the war, several dozen journalists have been killed or taken prisoner when performing their duty. State disinformation and censorship as well as the systemic and daily repression of independent media in Russia and Belarus have reached unprecedented levels, resulting in a media space largely subject to the state apparatus. We call on Russia to immediately and unconditionally release journalists and other media actors imprisoned solely for doing their work, including in the occupied Ukrainian territories. We also call on Belarus to do the same.

Madam Chair,

It is with concern that our countries have observed in recent months an intensification of intimidation and violence against journalists and media actors in the OSCE area through disinformation campaigns, SLAPPS, and surveillance activities. These are major challenges for the future of independent journalism and public interest media, tasked with informing the democratic choices of our citizens in a pluralistic way. The increasing use of new technologies for repressive purposes against the media, including through artificial intelligence, is particularly alarming and deserves special attention of participating States. Your commitment and that of your teams on these topics rightly place our Organization at the crossroads of the challenges of the future of our societies.

Madam Chair,

We call on all participating States to take the necessary steps to implement the OSCE commitments on media freedom and the safety of journalists, as they are the cornerstones of our common security. /.