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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 10 - 21 September 2018

EU statement – Working Session 11: Fundamental freedoms I (continued), including freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, national human rights institutions and the role of civil society in the protection of human rights, and freedom of movement

Mr. Moderator,

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

The EU continues to attach the highest priority to freedom of expression, universally including in the OSCE area. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right of every human being, constitutes a cornerstone of democracy, and serves as an enabler to other human rights including the fundamental freedoms of religion or belief, and peaceful assembly and association. There is a clear link between free expression and free media, and open, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our joint security.

Technological innovations have created new opportunities for individuals to seek, receive and impart information, engage in journalism, and contribute to decision-making processes. All human rights that exist offline must also be protected online. That is, the same human rights granted upon individuals and the same responsibilities and obligations on states in the physical world must also apply in the digital world, in particular the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy, which also includes the protection of personal data.

The EU is deeply concerned about the increasing efforts by some OSCE participating States to unduly and disproportionately restrict the right to freedom of expression and opinion, not least online. In Russia, we are concerned about recent legal initiatives targeting social networks, including by extending the detrimental brand of "foreign agent" to individuals, including journalists, bloggers, experts and other social media users. We also call on Russia to reconsider the blocking of the Telegram application, reportedly used by 9.5 million Russians.



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In Turkey, the EU is concerned about the shrinking democratic space manifested for example by restrictions of online expression, including the new provisions extending the already far reaching powers of the Radio and Television Supreme Council in allocating licenses for online broadcasting. The EU has also voiced concerns regarding the repeated blocking of websites in Belarus, including Charter97.org, as well as legal amendments providing the Ministry of Information with strict control over all online resources. Many other examples in the OSCE area could be mentioned.

The EU recalls that in Sofia 2004, participating States agreed to take action to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression. This is a crucial issue today. The internet must be open, free and secure with equal access and inclusiveness for all, as well as being guided by the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

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 refrain from any restrictions on freedom of expression which are not prescribed by law and in line with international law.
- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.
- Respect the mandate and autonomy of the Representative and provide him with the necessary resources to fulfil the mandate.

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, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

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