



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
The Representative on Freedom of the Media  
Jan Braathu**

## **Regular Report to the Permanent Council**

***For the period from 6 December 2024 to 10 April 2025***

Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Four months after my appointment as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, I have the honor of presenting my first report to the Permanent Council today. While it is still early in my mandate, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to meet with nearly all of you. Over the past few months, I held 75 official meetings in Vienna and during my trips to Norway, Finland and Greece, including bilateral meetings with 42 OSCE participating States, 14 meetings with representatives of media and civil society, as well as 10 speaking engagements.

I appreciate our constructive initial exchanges on media freedom in your respective states and across the OSCE region. I have been encouraged by your expressions of good will and support for the freedom of media mandate and for information that you have shared on the current situation in your countries. There is a growing body of interesting approaches to challenges that we can all benefit from learning more about and I look forward to exploring this together with you in the time ahead.

I was honored to participate in the inaugural ceremony of the International Training Center for the Safety of Journalists and Media Professionals in Thessaloniki last month. I commend the Center's important efforts to ensure protection of journalists in Greece and elsewhere, through the adoption of an effective holistic approach to safety of journalists and the development of different programmes to support journalists.

Also encouraging is the Joint Statement that followed the EU-Central Asia Summit in Samarkand earlier this month, which rightly places media freedom at the center of cooperation. It reflects a shared understanding of the vital role of independent media in promoting transparency, accountability and trust in our societies. This regional endorsement is an important milestone which I fully support.

I look forward to engaging with those representatives I have not yet had the opportunity to meet and am committed to maintaining this dialogue on a regular basis at various levels with all OSCE participating States.

With today's report, I aim primarily to provide an analytical overview of key challenges to media freedom across the OSCE region. Concurrently, I will outline my plans for addressing these challenges and effectively implementing my mandate in the time ahead.

I have taken up the mandate at a time when media is under pressure across the OSCE region. The challenges vary in substance and intensity, but the general picture is one of pressures and challenges of varying kinds throughout our widespread region.

Yet, this organization and this mandate were indeed conceived for challenging times. The OSCE's strength as a platform for security lies precisely in its principles, which you as participating States have pledged to uphold. Restoring our foundational principles is essential.

We must reaffirm the values and vision of the OSCE, recognizing our shared responsibility in shaping our agenda for peace and security – with media freedom as an integral component.

This year marks a pivotal moment as we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. In her opening remarks at Finland's assumption of the chairpersonship for 2025, Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Elina Valtonen, pointed out that in 1975, the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act was in many ways considered radical. At the time, Europe was ideologically polarized and geographically divided, yet, States agreed on high principles of common security, territorial integrity and respect for human rights. Fifty years later, our shared belief and fundamental desire for peace and freedom as embodied in the Helsinki Final Act remains unchanged. These values guided us then, and they continue to define the OSCE's mission today. This is not the least with respect to the issues that fall under my mandate.

The principles on media freedom, freedom of expression and the free flow of information stated in Helsinki were re-affirmed in the Budapest Document in 1994, and I quote: "The participating States reaffirm that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and basic component of a democratic society. In this respect, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government."

The essence of these principles, is reflected in the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media from 1997.

"There is no security without media freedom". This was the slogan my predecessor Teresa Ribeiro chose three years ago. I firmly stand by this principle. Having served the OSCE in various capacities over the years, I recognize the importance of continuity and building on past achievements. Continuity means acknowledging the steps taken by those before me, while recognizing the need to adapt to changing conditions and evolving challenges. It is with this sense of responsibility and perspective that I approach this mandate, committed to carrying forward what has been built, while fostering tailored responses in keeping with changing circumstances and possibilities.

## **CHALLENGES**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since assuming my role, I have observed tendencies that mitigate against the very principles and commitments that you have consensually and collectively undertaken: Threats of various kinds against journalists in conducting their profession, impunity for crimes against journalists that embolden further violence, and obstacles to the viability of independent professional and ethical media. There is an ongoing veritable revolution in media technologies. The cumulative effect of these trends is the weakening – even undermining – of the media's ability to fulfil their role as sources of objective, verified and relevant information to citizens. These tendencies are mirrored in growing distrust and even anti-media sentiments. Our societies are increasingly polarized and we are losing the common ground on which to conduct vital debates on government and society. Trust is declining, not only trust in media, but also more generally. This is a danger for our societies.

The information ecosystem is under strain from almost all sides. My view is that media and journalists are *not* the enemy, that the profession of journalism is *not* a crime and that journalists and media provide a *public good* that we rely on in our democratic decision-making.

## **ONLINE CHALLENGES**

Digital transformations have amplified many of these developments. Today's online information ecosystem poses serious risks to freedom of expression, access to information and, in turn, democratic resilience. Independent journalism increasingly depends on a small number of dominant tech platforms regarding distribution, visibility, advertising revenue, and audience access. This immense concentration of power of gatekeepers to information creates vulnerabilities, while harmful narratives are fueled by their attention-based business models and algorithms that reward sensationalism, usually to the detriment of factual and objective information and debate.

Against the backdrop of evolving online challenges, I am increasingly concerned about the growing scale and reach of hateful narratives in media. Let me refer to international law: grave forms of hate speech, including antisemitism, islamophobia and other forms of speech that incite to discrimination, hostility or violence are *not* protected speech.

As I highlighted at the Finnish Chairperson's Conference on Addressing Antisemitism in February, freedom of expression does not protect incitement to hatred and violence. Taking action to combat hate speech, antisemitism, and other forms of intolerance in media is therefore essential to upholding OSCE commitments and to safeguarding freedom of expression for all, both online and offline.

Since I assumed my role, the major tech platforms that shape and increasingly control global information flows have scaled back their commitment to content moderation and information integrity. AI companies appear to have reduced their engagement on human rights-related matters, while fact-checking in some quarters is increasingly seen as being contentious.

## **VIABILITY**

The dominance of tech platforms in content distribution and digital advertising undermines the viability of traditional media, as opaque algorithms favor engagement over accuracy, bypassing editorially moderated journalism. Traditional business models, which have been eroding for over a decade, are under great strain, some would say even collapsing. The reduction of funding opportunities for independent media consolidates limited information landscapes, thereby weakening the diversity of information and voices necessary for an informed public discourse.

This has systemic democratic implications. Access to independent, local information and quality media is becoming increasingly limited. Public interest information and quality

journalism cannot be considered a luxury, it is a public good and a necessity for democratic governance systems.

This is why I have selected the topic of media viability for our two Regional Media Conferences scheduled for this year in Sarajevo and Tashkent. Media viability refers to the media's ability to produce reliable quality journalism in a sustainable way. Participating States should recognize their responsibility, not only to refrain from interference, but to actively safeguard media sustainability, including with funding that strengthens editorial independence, fosters pluralism, and serves the public interest – without becoming a tool for control. There are good practices in this regard among OSCE participating States.

### ***SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS***

The OSCE has long recognised that a free media and the safety of journalists are integral components of comprehensive security, and the participating States, reaffirmed in Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists their commitment to create an environment in which journalists can work freely, safely and without fear.

Yet, despite commitments, journalists across the OSCE region continue to be targeted, harassed, imprisoned and even killed for doing their jobs. Journalists continue to be arrested and detained in retaliation for their work, to be injured, or accused of sedition. Independent media have been shut down, accreditation to international or foreign media have been denied, and access restrictions have been imposed. None of this is in keeping with OSCE commitments.

The digital ecosystem also facilitates invisible repression against journalists, such as cyberattacks, surveillance, and orchestrated smear campaigns. Our commitments underscore that journalists should not be subject to unlawful or arbitrary surveillance or interception of communications, as this infringes on freedom of expression and the right to privacy. Surveillance and digital repression activities are instruments of political control directed against journalists, particularly when investigating and reporting on sensitive issues of public interest.

During the first months of my mandate, I have witnessed how, in some participating States, journalists were particularly heavily targeted, verbally and physically attacked and imprisoned arbitrarily in retaliation for their work, followed by prolonged detentions. I am closely following and reacting to such cases and worrying developments in a number of participating States.

I am also concerned about the gender dimension of the safety of journalists. Women journalists, in particular, face distinct and heightened risks, both online and offline. Gender-based violence against journalists is widespread, with online attacks potentially spilling over into physical harm. These threats not only endanger individual journalists but also undermine media diversity and the public's access to varied perspectives.

Our OSCE commitments recognize the role of governments, legislators and the judiciary in enabling a safe working environment and ensuring safety of journalists. I am, however,

concerned by significant gaps in implementation of commitments in general and the 2018 Ministerial Council Decision in particular.

## **WAR AND CONFLICT**

Safety of journalists is under particular threat during armed conflict, where journalists risk their lives to report on unfolding events. They provide continuous coverage and first-hand accounts of human rights violations and breaches of international law. Yet, all too often, they pay the highest price for their commitment to reporting. The first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting organized by the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship and supported by my Office and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights emphasized the urgent need to enhance journalist safety in conflict settings.

The war against Ukraine waged by the Russian Federation continues to exacerbate risks for journalists. In recent weeks, journalists have once again been killed as a consequence, which I have consistently condemned throughout my initial months in this mandate. Journalists, on whichever side of the conflict, have the same protected status under International Humanitarian Law. Targeting reporters is a breach of their protected status. This goes for all conflicts in the OSCE region.

## **LEGAL THREATS / FOREIGN AGENT LAWS**

From the outset of my tenure, I want to stress the need for robust regulatory frameworks that provide journalists with a safe working environment, guaranteeing that a free and pluralistic media can fulfil its key role in our societies. Participating States have a responsibility to ensure strong protections for media freedom, both in law and in practice.

Across various parts of the OSCE region, I have observed the ongoing proliferation of different types of draft legislation targeting foreign funding for media. As mentioned in the context of media viability, the funding of media – whether public or private, foreign or domestic – should be based on strong commitments to independence, pluralism, transparency and serving the public interest. While I acknowledge the legitimate interest of transparency and addressing foreign information manipulation, not all foreign funding should inherently be equated with malign influence. It is crucial that any limitation of freedom of expression or freedom of the media must strictly comply with the requirements of the tripartite test: it has to be prescribed by law, be in pursuit of a legitimate aim and be necessary and proportionate.

Any regulation of freedom of expression or freedom of the media should be accompanied by strong safeguards against its potential misuse and/or abuse. The free flow of information is a core principle outlined in the Helsinki Final Act and I am concerned about laws that attempt to restrict or otherwise control the information space.

All too often, however, the adoption of such laws appears to result in selective application and abuse of powers. Media can be targeted or at least be ‘collateral damage’ of the adoption and application of this type of legislation, which typically establishes what appears to be disproportionate sanctions, creates risks of stigmatization or harassment and confers significant bureaucratic burdens – all of which lead in practice to the silencing of critical voices, obstructing investigative reporting, and curtailing media diversity.

Based on recent developments since I took office, I want to highlight some situations of particular concern.

Last year, my Office conducted several legal reviews and, together with ODIHR, also reviewed draft legislation connected to foreign funding. The reviews indicate the need for strong safeguards to ensure compliance with the strict requirements provided in international human rights law governing the imposition of restrictions on freedom of expression. In the case of the Georgian law on transparency of foreign influence, the legal review identified serious deficiencies that render the law incompatible with international human rights standards and OSCE commitments.

Georgia's recent adoption of the Foreign Agents Registration Act and its implementation to register media and journalists as "foreign agents" can be seen as an attempt to label and stigmatize independent journalism. It is accompanied by other legal attempts to limit or ban foreign funding for independent media and to give sweeping powers to government authorities to control the flow of information. These laws should be rescinded.

In Georgia, over the last months, we have seen a deterioration of the situation for media and journalists. Attacks and arrests of journalists and media workers, and apparently disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force during peaceful protests. I have publicly condemned these developments, as have a number of other actors including the OSCE Troika and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). I encourage the Georgian government to follow through in a timely manner with its announcement to effectively investigate the cases of violence and excessive force. I reiterate my call on the government to release from detention journalists who have been arbitrarily arrested or detained.

I have also publicly condemned the recent precipitous approval by the Bosnia and Herzegovina's entity of Republika Srpska of the entity's law on "foreign agents." This law contravenes international human rights standards and OSCE commitments on media freedom. As it stands, the law will stigmatize and burden media outlets that register as non-governmental organizations, which will in turn diminish the free flow of information. By limiting the public's access to diverse sources of information, pluralistic democracy is diminished. I have urged Republika Srpska authorities to suspend the law's enforcement.

I am also concerned about similar legal developments and discussions of comparable laws in other participating States and I shall monitor developments closely and engage on issues as they arise. I urge authorities of all participating States to ensure that legislation is in compliance with international commitments to foster media freedom. I have offered the assistance of my Office toward this end.

Across the OSCE region, we are witnessing an alarming rise in the abuse of legal systems to harass and silence journalists, particularly through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Such lawsuits, often initiated by politicians or businesspeople, are not intended to implement the law or seek justice but rather to intimidate, exhaust, and financially burden journalists and media outlets. They are in fact attempts to discourage critical reporting on matters of public interest. Lawsuits that are deemed meritless are also

an unnecessary burden on already overburdened judicial systems. The OSCE has applicable standards and commitments, also in this regard: The 2018 Ministerial Council Decision asks participating States to “ensure that defamation laws do not carry excessive sanctions or penalties” that could “effectively censor journalists.”

An enabling environment for media freedom depends on a robust legal framework, one that guarantees the freedom, independence, and sustainability of the media, allowing it to effectively serve the public interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Excellencies,

I have highlighted some of the challenges I see regarding media freedom across the OSCE region. I want to now present how I aim to address these manifold and multi-faceted challenges. I have spent the past four months on developing an approach for addressing the challenges in ways that will be both effective but also sustainable in the long term.

It is imperative that we revert to our jointly agreed principles and that we be guided by them.

As I reflect on the implementation of my mandate, there are three key documents that guide me:

The Helsinki Final Act, one of the single most successful products of global diplomacy, developed during the Cold War, at a time of profound crisis and polarization, not unlike today. A document, and a process, that promoted much-needed dialogue and understanding in a polarized world, and eventually led to the resolution of conflicts and respect for human rights.

A core aspect of the Helsinki Final Act is the importance of ensuring the free “Circulation of, Access to, and Exchange of Information” across national borders. As we observe across the OSCE region, retaliatory efforts to expel foreign correspondents and shut down foreign media, it is crucial to remember this principle. Let us not forget that already 50 years ago, diplomats and Heads of States of the then CSCE participating States understood that in order to promote peace and security, we need to promote the exchange and dissemination of information from, and about, other participating States, in times of peace and in times of war. While much has changed in the way journalism and public interest information is produced and disseminated and the technology adopted, this very principle remains and I will seek to ensure that it is respected.

Secondly, Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on Safety of Journalists, a commitment made by all participating States to respect a series of very clearly defined principles that ensure that journalists can carry out their work freely, safely and without fear of retaliation, online and offline, in their own countries and elsewhere, covering conflicts or investigating wrongdoings.

I see it as a duty to focus my work throughout the course of my mandate on the implementation of the commitments under the Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists, not only in pursuance of media freedom, but also because the strength of our



rules-based international order stands on the full respect of joint commitments. My work will be based on the principles agreed by all 57 participating States.

In order to do this, together with my Office, I am establishing an implementation monitoring mechanism that foresees the drafting of annual reports about participating States' advances, and persisting gaps, in implementing the Ministerial Council Decision. I think it will be useful to have a systematic approach to the fulfilment of consensual OSCE commitments. At a recent meeting of National Focal Points on Safety of Journalists, who have been nominated by participating States, we have discussed the possibility that National Focal Points provide input into these reports in order to ensure they are as objective as possible. I encourage all participating States to nominate National Focal Points who can contribute to this process.

I will of course discuss the annual reports with individual participating States so as to focus on areas where my Office and I can work together with you to promote the full implementation of your commitments under the Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists.

The third document that guides me in the implementation of my mandate is naturally the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media itself, which points to three core elements:

- Observing media developments;
- Assuming an early-warning function; and
- Assisting participating States in fulfilling their commitments to media freedom.

The mandate clearly states that I shall "assist the participating States in a spirit of cooperation" and thus contribute to resolution of issues, including by providing guidance in developing policy and regulatory frameworks in different areas.

As new developments continue to threaten media freedom, I look to have a medium-to-longer term focus on the standard-setting role of my mandate. This work is essential in guiding participating States in their efforts to protect and promote media freedom. Developing tangible, clear, and forward-looking standards is a serious and complex process that demands rigorous precision, meaningful engagement with diverse stakeholders, and sustained dedication – all of which I am committed to throughout the implementation of my mandate.

In the context of standard setting, I intend to initially focus on three areas, which are particularly problematic in many parts of the OSCE region and for which I believe we need more clearly defined OSCE-wide standards to guide participating States.

The first area relates to the ongoing proliferation of different types of draft legislation targeting foreign funding for civil society and media. I have mentioned before the challenges that so-called "foreign agent laws" pose to media freedom and journalism. While I recognize that States have a legitimate interest to ensure transparency rules for all sectors, for example, to prevent election meddling and possibly illegal influence over election processes, the adoption of such laws can result in selective application and abuse of powers. News media have become "collateral damage" of the adoption and application of this type of legislation. I am therefore developing a Recommendation that will seek to define a commitments-

compliant framework for restrictions on foreign funding for news media and to warn against using such laws to clamp down on independent journalism.

The second area relates to the use of SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) to silence critical and investigative journalists. The European Commission and the Council of Europe both have proposed standards and strategies to counter SLAPPs. In this area, as generally, I shall build on the relevant work done by others and bring forward best practices in order to implement the OSCE commitments that all participating States have agreed to. To this end, I seek to analyze effective strategies in countries that already have safeguards against abusive lawsuits in their legal system. On the basis of this analysis, I will develop proposals for OSCE-wide standards to counter SLAPPs and discuss their implementation.

The third area relates to the need to define a regulatory framework for internet governance, and in particular social media and big tech platforms to ensure information integrity online. I am convinced you are all very aware of the challenges of developing regulation in this area and ensuring that any regulatory framework does not aim at censoring specific content or reducing freedom of expression, but rather focuses on processes and practices in view of promoting public interest information. Currently we experience that social media very often spreads hate speech and inaccurate content. I look forward to presenting guidelines to participating States and working with you towards their implementation.

In this context, I would also mention the importance of media literacy. I shall work to develop recommendations on media literacy curricula and programs. A number of participating States have already developed such programs and I am eager to learn from them, so as to share good practices and useful approaches within the OSCE.

The RFoM Office is currently also working on developing a set of guidelines on the principles of public interest journalism that will determine the need to combine both a human rights framework and a public interest framework in the protection of media freedom.

My work on standard-setting and policy recommendations will in no way diminish my daily focus on monitoring of media freedom developments and my reactions to these developments. I shall be active in reacting, by reaching out to the participating States in question and in speaking up and out on the issues at hand. As I have said in bilateral conversations with participating State delegations, I intend to modulate my approach according to the issues at hand and possibilities for effective remedies. I want to contribute constructively to positive change.

I will – as I have already initiated – continue to have systematic contact with, and solicit information from, journalists' associations as well as individual journalists, academia and non-governmental organizations from throughout the OSCE region. Their views and concerns will help shape my analysis of ongoing developments.

I aim to continue the close cooperation with the Finnish Chairpersonship, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, as well as with all OSCE executive structures, OSCE field presences and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). In these challenging times, it becomes even more crucial to work together in coordination and complementarity.

Of course, I shall also liaise with the United Nations agencies, the Council of Europe and others, in addition to ODIHR. As my mandate instructs, I will draw on information from, and cooperation with, ODIHR.

By fostering synergies, we can build on each other's efforts to tackle crucial issues like SLAPPs, platform governance, and access to quality media and public interest information.

I also want to underline the crucial role of working throughout the OSCE region. I have already briefly mentioned our Regional Media Freedom Conferences for Southeast Europe in Sarajevo and for Central Asia in Tashkent later this year. The regional conferences enable us to discuss concrete regional media freedom issues, share best practices and advance solutions in a multi-stakeholder setting. By enhancing capacity for policy development and strengthening regional collaboration, the regional conferences encourage collective action to address multidimensional threats to media freedom and support the development of more effective regional strategies. It brings us from Vienna to the participating States, and that is important.

### **BUDGET**

However, this outreach depends on budgetary resources, and currently this and other activities are funded thanks to Extra-budgetary contributions. In fact, given the current budgetary situation, mandate implementation actually depends on extra-budgetary contributions. Currently, 93% of our Unified Budget covers staff costs, while the remaining 7% covers non-staff costs, including travel.

As the only global intergovernmental media freedom watchdog, this mandate plays a crucial role in monitoring, assessing, and providing early warnings on media freedom, while also building capacity to strengthen democratic resilience. However, delivering this mandate based on the principles and commitments of the OSCE and at the high level needed, requires adequate financial resources – resources that are increasingly scarce.

Over the past four years, the amount of UB funds has remained the same, while both the costs required to cover expenses and the challenges this mandate was established to address have only increased. Despite the Office's best efforts, this mandate closed 2024 on the brink of a financial deficit. A deficit was avoided because for four months there was reduced activity due to there not being an RFoM in office. But now there is one, and I am expected to ensure mandate implementation.

This situation is not sustainable. Underfunding threatens our ability to fulfil our mission, the mission that your participating States have mandated.

I am committed to looking into how we can continue to achieve the maximum value for our money, leveraging digital tools where possible. My predecessors have already cut operating costs to the bone. Meaningful engagement on the ground, meeting with states and convening stakeholders, trust-building and capacity building – in view of creating lasting change – requires adequate resources. I have prepared a document on the budget and funding situation that I will share with you all.

Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have highlighted throughout this report, I am committed to the grand vision of the Helsinki Final Act and the specific mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Political will and the support of participating States is essential to ensuring strong national and international safeguards for media freedom.

I am encouraged by the valuable conversations with many of you over recent months and look forward to continue in a collaborative manner, based on the principles agreed.

In conclusion, I would like to convey my appreciation to the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship for their firm support and for prioritizing media freedom issues, as well as to all OSCE structures and external partners whose dedication and contributions are indispensable to the accomplishments of this mandate.

Moreover, I wish to express my acknowledgement to you, the OSCE participating States, and a special gratitude to those providing extrabudgetary contributions or seconding qualified staff. Not the least, I thank the dedicated and competent team at the Office of the RFoM for their dedication and professionalism.

We must value our own commitments and protect and promote media freedom for the benefit of our shared vision of peace and security. I look forward to working with all of you towards this aim.

Thank you for your attention and support.

#### *Annex 1*

### **PROJECTS**

In addition to the areas and methods of work highlighted above, I want to stress the unique value of the projects that my Office has been working on and that address the various complex challenges to media freedom, as well as to act proactively on evolving issues that threaten to hinder media freedom. They were made possible thanks to the generous ExB contributions of some participating States. I want to express my thanks to Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America for your support.

I will briefly outline the key project work of my Office that contribute to defending media freedom in these turbulent, rapidly changing times.

As outlined above, the threats facing media freedom and journalists in retaliation for their work come in many forms, physical, digital, legal, and economic. The challenges are old and new, simple and sophisticated, and have mounted up over the years. While I hold a mandate

that is flexible enough to address all these issues, I want to remind all of you that the safety of journalists is a shared responsibility. You all have committed to enhancing the safety of journalists for the sake of peace and security in the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists. My Office and I are fully committed to assisting you in implementing it.

I sincerely appreciate the excellent collaboration between our office and SPU during Phase 1 of the project "Strengthening the Capacity of Media Stakeholders to Apply Media Standards and Promote Media Literacy". This collaboration has been instrumental in promoting media literacy, strengthening self-regulatory mechanisms and fostering ethical journalism, especially in the challenging context of this ongoing war. Among the many accomplishments of the first phase was the successful convening of high-impact conferences and events that enabled inclusive and meaningful stakeholder dialogue. These results underscore the strength of our partnership and affirm the critical importance of collective action in promoting freedom of expression and democratic resilience.

As we look ahead to the next phase, I am committed to building on this strong foundation by supporting SPU's strategic priorities in advancing media freedom, particularly by strengthening the safety of journalists and promoting robust self-regulatory standards.

In the framework of our project on the Safety of Journalists, we launched a toolbox designed to support efforts in closing the implementation gap. It provides guidance, highlights good practice examples of national instruments and initiatives, and encourages enhanced cooperation and coordination. As most recent addition, we have just launched a podcast series to explore key thematic areas based on the Ministerial Council Decision, including data collection and reporting on attacks, secure working conditions, journalists' safety in conflict situations, intersectional perspectives, legal harassment, police prevention and the fight against impunity, and digital safety. To further support the implementation of the Ministerial Council Decision, we have established a network of National Focal Points as mentioned before. Last month, I had the pleasure to witness first-hand the impact of these collaborative efforts when joining their recent meeting in Greece. I would like to express my appreciation to Greece for the good cooperation in organizing this important gathering.

In the months ahead, my Office will intensify efforts to advocate for stronger legal protections and support measures against abusive litigations. Journalists' ability to hold power to account must be safeguarded, not undermined, by the law.

Addressing the safety of journalists requires a holistic approach that takes into account a variety of factors that are often intersecting and compound risks of attacks. The experiences and risks of violence differ significantly for different journalists, based on whether they are a woman, belong to a historically marginalized group, work as a freelancer, cover armed conflicts, or have been forced into displacement. The gendered nature of online violence remains a pressing issue. This year marks the 10th anniversary of our flagship project on the safety of female journalists online (SOFJO), and we will assess the important progress made in combating online violence over the past decade. We are also developing a comprehensive capacity-building strategy which seeks to ensure women journalists can engage in public debates, online and offline, without fear of harassment, attacks, or violence.

Equally, it is crucial to improve the protection of journalists under severe political pressure. By promoting an enabling and safe working environment for all journalists so they can continue reporting unhindered on matters of public interest directly contributes to security and peace across our region. We need to address the specific needs and challenges journalists under severe political pressure face.

To address challenges posed in the digital context, our project on healthy online information spaces seeks to develop concrete policy guidance for OSCE participating States, focusing on enhancing the availability and accessibility of reliable, diverse, and public interest information online. This includes promoting an online environment that fosters media freedom and pluralism through technological means and better internet governance. In the coming months, my Office will present comprehensive guidance on effective ways to ensure media viability, media visibility, and media vigilance in the age of big tech and artificial intelligence. This guidance is built on a set of expert roundtables that my Office organized over the course of the last months. The policy guidance will, I am convinced, contribute to a vision on the democratic role of journalism in the algorithmic society, one that safeguards its essential contributions to peace and security.

In view of addressing the global media freedom crisis, I am convinced that we need to address it in a systematic way, by engaging all sectors seeking to positively influence the global information and security space, and to unite them in a shared vision of a Public Interest Framework that is articulable, achievable and clear. My Office's project on media freedom dialogues aims to establish mechanisms for interaction among key stakeholders of media freedom and security. To this end, we are organizing regional disinformation dialogues and structured dialogues on cross-cutting themes and emerging issues. Last month, we held our first Structured Dialogue on Media and Security, the Vienna Dialogue on Disinformation. Last week, I hosted another Structured Dialogue on Media and Security, focusing on a Public Interest Framework for the Future of Journalism and bringing together representatives from international media freedom organizations. I am convinced that we have to work together to identify effective methods of recognizing and prioritizing public interest information that serves peace and security. This mandate and this organization are at the right place to do so.