EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Conference
Internet 2013: Shaping policies to advance media freedom
Vienna, 15 February 2013

EU Closing Remarks

1. The European Union wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, and to her team for having organised the first OSCE conference on Internet freedom.

2. Over the last two days media experts, government officials, NGO representatives and others have met to discuss some of the many questions and challenges that have accompanied technological developments such as the Internet and social media. We recognize that no one participating State has the right answer to these complex questions but greatly appreciate having had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with multiple stakeholders. We remain convinced of the importance of ensuring that human rights are protected and promoted in using online and mobile technologies.

3. But the regrettable truth is, as reported by the RFoM to the Permanent Council in November of last year, that our common commitments in the field of freedom of expression and free media continue to be partially and arbitrarily applied in some participating States, particularly when it comes to the Internet.

4. In this context, we would like to thank the RFoM and her team for their tireless efforts in exercising her mandate by identifying and responding to violations of these commitments, including the representative's continued focus on preserving the openness of and pluralism on the internet. In order to make good use of the expertise the Representative and her Office can offer, we urge all participating States that have not already done so to extend open invitations to the Representative.

5. To conclude – Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are essential to the development of democracy and there can be no substantial democratic progress without the free exchange of independent news and opinion. We should not restrict the free flow of information in response to technological developments but encourage open Internet access in the entire OSCE region. We recognise the need to promote a safe online environment, especially for children and young people. The "Safer Internet Programme"[1] of the European Union, for example, aims at empowering and protecting children and young people online by awareness raising initiatives and by fighting illegal and harmful online content and conduct. Equally, the EU Cyber Security Strategy[2] launched last week on the 7th of February 2013 has at its heart the firm belief that the protection of fundamental rights is as important in the virtual world as it is in the real world, that a free and open Internet is served by trust and confidence-building between states and between the private and public sectors. We believe that empowerment of thriving citizens and confidence building is the way forward rather than censorship, attempts to control access or content, and regulation. We hope that the discussions of the last few days have persuaded participating States of the value of doing so.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ *Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.*

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[1] http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/policy/programme/index_en.htm

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/eu-cybersecurity-plan-protect-open-internet-and-online-freedom-and-opportunity-cyber-security