



EUROPEAN UNION

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

EU statement – Working Session 3: Freedom of the Media (specifically selected topic)

Mr. Moderator,

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

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, is crucial for our common security and remains a top priority for the European Union. Looking at the conflicts in the OSCE region, the concept of comprehensive security underpinning this organization is more valid than ever. Security and human rights go hand in hand. There is no contradiction between these two, no balance to be struck: Instead, security in and between states cannot be achieved without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, not least media freedom.

The EU is therefore concerned about the abuse in parts of the OSCE area of the notion of national security. Excessive anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation is used to silence dissenting voices. To the contrary, any infringements to freedom of expression must remain an exception provided for by law and subject to the test of proportionality and in strict conformity with international law. In this regard, we are for example concerned about the continued shuttering of media outlets in Turkey and the many trials against individual journalists because of alleged terrorism affiliation. We call on the Russian Federation to release Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, who was arrested in 2014 after expressing peaceful opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. He was convicted and detained on fabricated charges in a trial that fell well short of international standards. We regret the continued blocking of online media platforms in Azerbaijan based on their alleged threat to security.



EUROPEAN UNION

Further, the EU sees many challenges related to national security and media freedom in terms of disinformation and how to counter it. We are concerned by state-driven disinformation and propaganda affecting our security. We are concerned about governments engaging in censorship as an answer to disinformation, real or alleged. And we are concerned in general by attempts to brand independent media as "fake" or lying, thereby undermining journalism as such. Again, any restrictions must be in line with international law, taking into account that freedom of expression also protects information and ideas that may shock, offend and disturb. The EU believes that emphasis should instead be put on promoting media plurality, media literacy and source criticism, as well as voluntary media self-regulation.

In particular, the EU is concerned about the continued Russian use of disinformation campaigns to distort the media space in the OSCE region as a key tool of its destabilizing actions abroad. In Budapest in 1994 and in Istanbul in 1999 participating States recalled the risks of depriving citizens of a free media, of exploiting media in conflict and of fomenting hatred, violence and tension. We recall that participating States have committed themselves to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression and welcome the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in this regard.

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 unduly and disproportionately restricting freedom of expression, online and offline, under the guise of fighting extremism or terrorism.
- Devote special attention to the phenomenon of disinformation campaigns.
- Respect the freedom of expression and refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression.
- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.



EUROPEAN UNION

- 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.

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