



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF PORTUGAL
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Statement of the European Union in response to the Representative on Freedom of the Media

The European Union welcomes Mr. Haraszti to the Permanent Council once again and thanks him for his comprehensive report. We are also grateful to receive his special report on Modalities for Media Twinning, prepared pursuant to Permanent Council Decision 759, adopted in Brussels last December. This report will be studied carefully.

A free and independent media is a cornerstone of any democratic system and one measure of the health of democracy is the existence of an environment in which such media can flourish. It is therefore, a cause of serious concern to us that so many of the interventions which the Representative has made since his last report to the Permanent Council concern violent attacks against or killings of journalists. We urge all participating States to take necessary measures to protect the fundamental right of journalists to pursue their professional calling free from the threat or the use of violence. In this context we join the Representative in calling for a vigorous and transparent investigation by the authorities of Kyrgyzstan into the recent murder of Mr. Alisher Saipov.

The EU has always welcomed the fact that the Representative exercises his mandate throughout the OSCE area, since even in societies where media freedom is considered to be well established there is little room for

complacency. The Member States which are the subject of attention in today's report have taken careful note of the Representative's comments and will, where necessary, maintain close contact with his office.

We share the concern about the situation of the media in a number of participating States, highlighted by Mr. Haraszti. The case of Mr. Eynulla Fatullayev in Azerbaijan has already been raised by us in the Permanent Council, but since last week two more journalists have been incarcerated. We remain convinced that the media situation in Azerbaijan should be remedied, and call on all parties concerned to work together to find an acceptable solution. As stated on 24 May, the European Union stands ready to facilitate any attempt to move things forward.

We also share his concern at certain events in the Russian Federation, including a number of assaults on journalists. We hope that the Government of Tajikistan will take note of the concerns raised in the report about Articles 135 and 136 of the Criminal Code. Furthermore, we would like to repeat our deep concern about the recent suspension of independent media outlets in Georgia and welcome Mr. Haraszti's clear and timely statement on this. We urge the Georgian authorities to restore media freedom as soon as possible.

On a positive note, we welcome the announcement of the Justice Minister of Turkey that Article 301 of the Criminal Code will be changed and urge its complete repeal. We are also pleased to note that Belarus and Kazakhstan are working with the Office of the Representative on legal reviews of their media laws. We have noted the concerns raised by the Representative about incidents in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova and Montenegro and would hope to be kept informed of developments.

The EU has also considered the activities and visits, which the Representative intends to undertake in the near future and is fully supportive of them.

We should like to finish by thanking Mr. Haraszti once again for his report and his comments here today and to wish him continued success in his tasks.

The Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Armenia align themselves with this statement.