

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1060
Vienna, 18 June 2015**

**EU statement in response to the OSCE Representative for
Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report. We greatly appreciate and value the professionalism and integrity of Ms Mijatovic and of her team. We wish to underline our full support for the mandate of the Representative and the manner in which it is being executed by Ms Mijatovic.

In the reporting period, a significant part of the RFoM's concerns were directed to European Union member states. The European Union remains committed to engaging constructively with the RFoM in order to address these issues.

Mr Chairperson,

Since the Representative last reported to the Permanent Council we have witnessed both isolated and sustained attacks on freedom of expression in our region, especially the particularly deadly attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. They failed, however, in their effort to undermine freedom of expression. Rather citizens in Paris and Copenhagen, together with millions across our region, issued a defiant response and reaffirmed their commitment to the fundamental right of freedom of expression.

The EU has raised a number of concerns at the Permanent Council about developments in participating States that run contrary to our OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and limit the space for free media and expression in parts of our region. These concerns include developments in Belarus, Bosnia and Hercegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. We call on all participating States to do more to fully

implement our OSCE commitments in the area of freedom of expression and media freedom.

We wish to commend those participating States who have been engaging constructively with the Representative on issues of concern that she has raised. In particular, we welcome Albania's constructive dialogue with the RFoM, as well as the invitation extended to the Representative by the government of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Serbia's strengthened engagement with the Representative on addressing national media freedom challenges, and the priority that Serbia has given to media freedom during their Chairmanship, are both good examples of cooperation and commitments shown by the Serbian government this year.

Mr Chairperson,

This week's conference on Journalists' Safety, Media Freedom and Media Pluralism was a very timely event organised by the Representative. We also look forward to the expert meeting on threats to the safety of women journalists online, scheduled for September. Both are good examples of the valuable support and assistance the Representative is providing to participating States in addressing growing challenges to media freedom.

As we stated earlier this week, we are particularly concerned at the misuse, manipulation and attack on media taking place in the context of the crisis in and around Ukraine. Russian propaganda continues to foment tensions and fuel conflict. This was underlined in interventions at this week's conference. We are also concerned by the connection between aggressive policies abroad by a state and its repressive domestic policies.

Within Russia, the increased repression of independent voices, growing state control over the media, and proliferation of state propaganda are hampering a broad and informed public debate. The law on so called "undesirable" international organisations, as well as the expansion of the secrecy acts to include military losses in "peacetime" are recent concerning measures that have been introduced. We are also concerned by the threats against Elena Milashina, journalist from the *Novaya Gazeta*. These must be thoroughly and independently investigated. We call on

Russia to urgently abide by its commitments and obligations and enable a climate, in which an open and genuine debate, as well as public scrutiny of government actions can take place.

We also remain deeply concerned by the situation in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, where practically all Crimean Tatar media outlets have been forced to cease their activities. Ukrainian media outlets are also targeted and can no longer broadcast. We share the concerns of the RFoM about the repression of free media and independent voices on the peninsula, as well as in those parts of Ukraine under the control of Russian-backed separatists. We welcome the engagement of Ukrainian authorities with the Representative and the positive steps that have been taken in the reporting period. At the same time, we encourage Ukraine to act on the advice of the Representative as the Ukrainian government seeks to improve the media situation in the country.

As the host of the European Games, all eyes are on Azerbaijan. The EU has repeatedly brought up issues related to the systematic crackdown on human rights defenders and journalists by the government of Azerbaijan. We continue to follow the cases of Rasul Jafarov, Khadija Ismailova, Intigam Aliev, Leila and Arif Yunus, as well as other cases with deep concern. We express our full support for the interventions of by the Representative on the deteriorating situation in Azerbaijan. We urge the government of Azerbaijan to use the opportunity provided by the European Games to ensure that from this point forward journalists - both foreign and domestic - are free to report in Azerbaijan, not just on the European Games, but on all issues.

Ensuring Freedom of Expression is more crucial than ever and remains a top priority for the EU within the OSCE. With this in mind we took the initiative to table a draft ministerial decision on Freedom of Expression in the run up to the Basel Ministerial. As you are aware, this draft decision gained the support of the vast majority of participating States. We thus welcome the Chairmanship's intention to develop a ministerial deliverable on free media issues. We encourage the Chairmanship to consider a broader focus, addressing the wider challenges to freedom of expression and going beyond the important theme of journalists' safety.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, and the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA align themselves with this statement.

* Montenegro and Albania 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.