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EU statement on the visit of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to Belarus

The EU welcomes the fact that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Ms Dunja Mijatović visited Minsk last week at the invitation of the Belarusian authorities.

We welcome the readiness of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media's interlocutors to openly and constructively discuss the problems faced by independent media in Belarus. We also share the Representative's concerns about the situation of the media in Belarus. This includes the lack of media pluralism, the continued application of administrative restrictions against independent media, and the need for a gradual overhaul of the media legislation in order to better implement OSCE commitments related to freedom of the media. The EU also continues to be concerned by the possible negative impact of the Internet regulations introduced earlier this year and supports the Representative's call on Belarus to refrain from limiting freedom of the media on the Internet.

In this context, the EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to make full use of the assistance and expertise offered by the Representative and her Office. Ms Mijatović's participation in the Minsk roundtable discussion on Internet regulation on 25 October is a good example of that.

Free and independent media are essential elements of a functioning democracy and the EU would like to underline that media environment will be an important factor to be taken into account when assessing the electoral environment ahead of and during the forthcoming December presidential elections in Belarus.

The EU reiterates its readiness to deepen its relations with Belarus depending on positive developments in Belarus towards democracy, human rights and rule of law, including in the area of freedom of expression and of the media as stated in the Council of the European Union conclusions on Belarus adopted last month.

On a more general note, the EU would like to express its full support to the Representative's activities. We encourage all participating States to cooperate closely with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and to consider inviting her to visit their respective countries.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area NORWAY, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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