



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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21 November 2019

Regular Report to the Permanent Council
for the period from 5 July 2019 to 21 November 2019

1. Introduction

Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to present to you my latest report to the Permanent Council which covers the period from July this year until today.

Just one year ago, the 57 participating States adopted a key and broad Ministerial Decision on Safety of Journalists. This was an important achievement in itself, but it is clear that we still have a lot to do to ensure the full implementation of this landmark Decision.

The truth is that many journalists and media workers are still being harassed and assaulted just for doing their work, reporting on issues of public interest, publishing their free opinion, and fulfilling their function as an institution of democracy.

No journalist was killed in our region during the five past months of this reporting period, which makes it almost an exception, but this does not mean, unfortunately, that there were no attacks or threats against their safety or their lives.

Just last week, on 14 November, Mario De Michele, the editor of the Campania Notizie website, in Italy, was shot at by two unknown individuals while driving his car in the town of Gricignano d'Aversa. Fortunately, the journalist escaped uninjured from this attack which is believed to be linked to his articles on the Camorra.

Mario De Michele was miraculously unwounded, unlike Levent Uysal, a journalist and former owner of the Yenigun newspaper in Turkey, who was shot in the leg by two perpetrators, outside his home, in the city of Balikesir, on 28 August. The perpetrators were brought to justice.

As you can see from the report, there were, in fact, many other grave incidents in this reporting period, like the grenade attack on the 112 Ukraine TV Channel premises in Kyiv, on 12 July, an act of intimidation which could have had dramatic consequences; or the hostage-like situation, on 27 September, during which two journalists of radio Sarajevo were threatened to death and forced to take down an article from their website, or, also, the violent aggression against the Guardian columnist Owen Jones by three persons on 17 August in London.

Sadly, again, too many female journalists suffered severe online harassment. Just last week, I welcomed the fact that a Dublin court sentenced a man, in Ireland, for having harassed and threatened 6 female journalists online over three years. This ruling can exemplify the fight against impunity of online threats against female journalists.

My Office continued to highlight the threats faced by female journalists online, through screenings of our documentary "A Dark Place" and panel discussions, with 11 screenings during this period. This included screenings in Spain, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, France, Belgium, the UK and the US. I want to thank also the OSCE Presence in Albania, and the OSCE Mission to Skopje and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina for organizing other screenings and such events on this topic.

In this reporting period, I intervened on issues relating to the physical safety of 69 journalists.

I want to underline that several of these cases were linked to incidents with journalists reporting on public demonstrations. From covering protests or marches in Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Spain or Poland, even if in very different contexts, too many journalists have been obstructed, brutalized or detained while trying to inform the public about these gatherings. This is a serious democratic concern.

The States have a responsibility to protect journalists and to make sure that they are able to do their work safely.

In that regard, the Ministerial Council Decision mentions the need to ensure the legal safety of journalists and I would like, in introducing this report, to insist on this specific issue. During this reporting period, I made 51 interventions on cases related to the legal safety of journalists, including 23 cases of new detentions and 13 new court proceedings.

On several occasions, I welcomed the release of imprisoned journalists on behalf of whom I had intervened in the past. Or the acquittal of journalists.

The journalists of Cumhuriyet in Turkey, were released earlier this year, including Kadri Gürsel and Musa Kart, and their sentences were reversed on 12 September.

This was a long awaited decision, as well as the acquittal of Erol Önderoğlu from Reporters Without Borders, on 24 September, and of Fatih Polat, the Editor-in-Chief of the Evrensel Daily, on 14 November.

In Ukraine and in the Russian Federation, I welcomed the release, on 7 September, of Kirill Vyshinsky, Oleg Sentsov and Roman Sushchenko, on the occasion of a wider exchange of prisoners.

For my Office and I, each of these events were rewarding and moving, as we raised the situation of these journalists many times to the authorities of the concerned participating States.

These decisions show that, with political will, and reforms, like the ongoing judicial reform in Turkey, it is possible to free more detained journalists.

But these advances have also been shown to be, sometimes, fragile.

I am deeply concerned by the re-arrest last week, on 12 November, of Ahmet Altan in Turkey, just one week after he was released with Nazli Ilıcak and I call again for the end of his detention.

I remain concerned by the cases of too many other journalists who continued to remain in custody, such as Afgan Mukhtarli sentenced to 6 years in prison in Azerbaijan; Stanislas Aseev, a RFE/RL contributor illegally sentenced to 15 years of prison in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and his colleague Oleh Halaziuk.

I will continue to call for their release, as well as that of all other imprisoned journalists in the OSCE region.

But my interventions on legal safety situations, in this reporting period or previous ones, relate not only to the detention of journalists. They also include forced closures of media outlets, blocking of websites, many defamation cases, administrative fines, or diverse attempts to uncover journalists' sources.

Most of these situations show that legislative and judicial reforms are needed, and must be completed, to ensure real protection of journalists' rights and full compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments.

In this regard, I would like to remind you that the Ministerial Council Decision calls on participating States "to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and all relevant OSCE commitments" and "to bring their laws, policies and practices, pertaining to media freedom, fully in compliance with their international obligations and commitments and to review and, where necessary, repeal or amend them".

We are facing legislative problems of different kinds.

Some are linked to legislations related to other issues than the media, but which have a detrimental impact on freedom of expression and the work of the media.

This happens currently, especially, with laws that aim to fight terrorism or violent extremism, which are too broadly or vaguely worded, or misused against the press. In the OSCE context, States should better take into account the broad concept of security of the organization, so as to not oppose security objectives with media freedom guarantees, and instead develop all efforts to make them compatible at all times.

Some problems are still linked to the abuse of defamation laws, or laws on insult to state officials, which carry unjustified and disproportionate penalties and which restrict the publication of issues of public interest and obstruct the work of the press on corruption issues, for example.

We also have problems linked to media regulation, for example on broadcasting systems, licensing, or public service media.

Next, we have new issues related to new legislations on the regulation of the Internet and social media content linked, for example, to the fight against hate speech, or against the manipulation of information. This was the topic of our recent panel on content moderation here in Vienna earlier this week.

The risk, after a period of lack of responsibility of the Internet platforms, is to see, now, these companies deciding, without any transparency, to over regulate and impose wide takedowns, or blocking of content, far beyond existing legal restrictions on freedom of expression, enshrined in national and international law.

I would also like to bring attention to the issue of the protection of journalists' sources, as we have seen more incidents related to this issue, which is very important for media freedom and investigative journalism.

For example, in the Netherlands, we saw the detention for a day of a journalist, Robert Bas from NOS, to try to force him to reveal his communications with a source; while in the UK we

witnessed attempts by the police to force news organizations, including the BBC and Sky News, to hand over their interview materials with a source. Luckily, the courts in these countries eventually recognized the importance of protecting the confidentiality of journalists' sources in these cases and ruled in favor of the press. In France, earlier this year, the same problem happened with the journalist Ariane Chemin from Le Monde and Mediapart, and I hope that the protection of sources will prevail too.

All these situations and problems reflect the importance of ensuring strong judicial and legal protections for freedom of the press in national legislation. In this regard, a legal environment more supportive of media freedom should, in particular, include the following conditions:

- 1) enshrining in the Constitution the principles of freedom of expression, freedom of the media and a ban on censorship;
- 2) the right to access and to use the Internet, so as to communicate, seek for, receive and impart information and opinions regardless of frontiers;
- 3) the presence of a media statute, in line with international standards and OSCE commitments;
- 4) the presence of a statute on access to information, in line with international standards;
- 5) the presence of a broadcasting statute, in line with international standards;
- 6) the presence of statutory guarantees on the independence and public accountability of the media regulator, such as national audio-visual media authorities or licensing bodies;
- 7) a law on public service media ensuring independence and sustainable financing of the public service media; public service media should not be run by the government;
- 8) any system of registration of media outlets, if in place (for example to benefit press aid or for specific tax exemptions), must be based on a voluntary notification and not on compulsory pre-authorization;
- 9) the absence of criminal liability for defamation or insult of individuals;
- 10) the absence of criminal liability for defamation or insult of public officials or heads of state;
- 11) ensuring that the laws against terrorism or extremism do not impede on freedom of expression or media freedom, by explicitly mentioning it and ensuring their implementation in conformity with international commitments on freedom of expression;
- 12) the absence of restrictions on media from another participating State based on the national origin or foreign origin of the concerned media.

In this spirit, I have continued to assist the participating States in shaping policies and legislation that do meet the proper requirements, in line with international standards and OSCE commitments. My Office has conducted several legal reviews, in Albania on the Law on Audiovisual Media and on the Law on Electronic Communications, we will send a new one in the coming days; and in Uzbekistan on the Television and Radio Broadcasting.

We have also published new sets of recommendations on the occasion of the two regional conferences that my Office organized, in which we have encouraged an open discussion with civil society organizations, media actors and international experts.

In July, we held our 21st Central Asia Media Conference in Bishkek, on the need to enhance media pluralism in a digital environment. The conference addressed the regulation of online media, safety of journalists and provided an overview of media freedom developments in the region.

In October, we held our 16th South Caucasus Media Conference in Tbilisi, during which the participants discussed safety of journalists and the media freedom situation in the region, the impact of digitalization on news creation, pluralism in the TV landscape and the issue of disinformation.

I would like to thank the governments of both Georgia and Kyrgyzstan for hosting us, and for the meetings we had with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, other members of government, and, in Georgia, the President, Madame Salome Zourabichvili, to discuss the media freedom situation in the country and our co-operation.

During this reporting period, I attended and spoke at several other conferences, in particular the Global Conference for Media Freedom in London, co-organized by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Canada, where I launched, with the special Rapporteurs of the United Nations, the Organisation of American States and the African Commission, a new Joint Declaration on media freedom and Digital rights; I took part also in the World Democracy Forum at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

In July, I had the privilege to address, in Washington D.C., the U.S. Helsinki Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in a hearing organized in the US Congress on the state of media freedom in the OSCE region, in the presence of the Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, Representative Alcee L. Hastings.

We will continue to develop our co-operation with all relevant international Organizations and civil society organizations to promote the media freedom principles of the OSCE at the international level and to benefit the best from others, valuable experience and expertise.

In September, I attended and addressed the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, where this year the safety of journalists, both physical and legal, was discussed as a specifically selected topic. My Office also organized four side events on media freedom issues and I spoke at two other events organized by the EU delegation and the Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists. This shows the growing importance being attributed to protecting journalists and ensuring they can carry out their work without fear of facing attacks, threats or abuse.

In October, in Cyprus, I launched a new exchange opportunity for journalists from both communities, as part of our Cyprus Media Dialogue Project. The exchange opportunity contributes to supporting media diversity and the free flow of information, by providing media content about the life of both communities to the Cypriot public, and will advance accountable, quality journalism in Cyprus. During my visit, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I thank the Government of Cyprus for their support to this project.

On 16 October, on the day of the two-year commemoration of the murder of the investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, I paid tribute to the journalist in Malta, and met with her family, and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to discuss the ongoing criminal investigation, the launch of a public inquiry, and the necessity to ensure that there will be no impunity for this crime.

Yesterday, I followed the important development in the investigation with the arrest of a man, the owner of an offshore company on which the journalist had published reports, who apparently tried to escape the country. I hope this will elucidate the case, and that all those

involved in this horrendous crime will face justice. As will those who organized the assassination of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in Slovakia, where four of them, including the mastermind, having been charged with murder on 21 October.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 6 November, we held for the first time in the history of the RFOM, a conference in Moscow on Freedom of the Media and Safety of Journalists in the Russian Federation and in the OSCE region, organized by my Office with the support of the Ministry of foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

This was the first such conference organized under the OSCE auspices on media freedom issue, in Russia, since 1991.

It was an opportunity for both independent journalists and media, like Ivan Golunov, Igor Rudnikov, Novaya Gazeta, Dozhd, The Bell, but also Kommersant and Vedomosti, and state owned media, to speak openly with the authorities on media freedom issues in the country, in the presence of representatives of international NGO experts who were also invited to this conference.

I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, for opening the event with me and for his participation in this discussion.

It was important for us, as we have intervened on different occasions on cases of journalists facing safety or legal situations, several of whom were present, including Svetlana Prokopyeva, and on different legislations that have an impact on media freedom. I hope we will be able to continue this frank and open dialogue in the future.

Finally, on 18 November my Office organized here, in Vienna, an event with four members of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Online Content Moderation, including former US Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

This event was organized in the framework of our project on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression and I thank the US and Dutch Delegations for welcoming our guests at different side meetings.

The range of our activities were particularly diverse, because the demands and the situation we face are so, and I did not develop on the substance of all our projects in this introduction.

But I would like to thank the Governments of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America for their contributions to the different projects of my Office during this reporting period.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding, facing the many challenges and risks to safety of journalists, legal safety and media freedom, I would call on all participating States to reinforce our co-operation.

Our principles, in this co-operation, must be the OSCE commitments, the MC Milan Decision on Safety of Journalists, and the broad concept of security of the organization that considers freedom of expression, access to information, and media freedom as integral parts of the security in the OSCE area.

Our method must be dialogue, without concealing problems and difficulties, a demanding dialogue, but looking to continually improve the situation, on the basis of the commitments, of my observation and early warnings, and of my recommendations in assisting the participating States to help them to be inspired by the best international standards.

I would like to thank my esteemed team for their hard work and dedication in sometimes difficult conditions, but who deliver to support journalists in need, and assist the participating States in the implementation of their commitments.

Thank you very much.

2. Issues raised with participating States

Albania

On **11 July**, following several consultations on the drafting process with government representatives, I published a legal review, prepared by Dr. Joan Barata Mir an independent media freedom expert, on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media in Albania**”. Besides mentioning the progress that has been achieved since previous versions, I stressed that the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) should not substitute the independent judiciary or self-regulatory mechanisms on issues of freedom of expression. This also applies for the blocking of content, fines for breaches of the law and the modalities of the right to reply. I emphasized that it is necessary that this legislation respects international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression.

On **22 July**, I wrote to the Prime Minister, Edi Rama, and on **23 July** issued a public statement, presenting an updated legal review on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media in Albania**”, to the “**Law on Electronic Communications**” and other relevant provisions regarding the regulation of certain types of online content provided through the Internet. I expressed my hope that our modifications would be introduced during the parliamentary process. I noted that important improvements had been made: the new drafts of the Law on Audiovisual Media incorporated new provisions that better define the object and scope of the law, mentioned the need for the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA) to respect international and regional standards in its decisions, and it included a specific adaption of the right to reply to the new environment of electronic publications. However, as I pointed out, several remaining issues still needed to be addressed. The legal review proposed to amend article 132/1 and the new article 33/1 (which mentions the “respect of privacy and dignity of citizens”), granting the AMA extensive new powers that could negatively impact the freedom of expression. (For more details, see Legal reviews).

On 11 September, representatives from my Office met with the Deputy Secretary General of the Director of the Regulatory and Compliance Department of the Prime Minister’s Office, Elira Kokona, and the Director of Communications of the Council of Ministers, Endri Fuga, to discuss the latest legal suggestions shared by my Office. On 12 September, I met with the Albanian Member of Parliament and Secretary of Committee on Legal Affairs, Klotilda Ferhati, for a discussion on the draft media legislation in Albania, in view of building legislation in accordance with OSCE commitments and best international media standards.

On 1 – 2 October, an independent expert, Peter Noorlander, in close co-ordination with Dr. Joan Barata Mir and together with a representative from my Office, visited Tirana to hold several meetings with the local authorities, and to participate in technical discussions related to the previous recommendations made by my Office. The consultations continued on the drafting of the legislation.

Armenia

On 2 August, I received a reply from the authorities in response to my letter of 7 March, requesting information regarding the notice sent by the Yerevan Municipality, on 21 February, calling on a number of media outlets to vacate their office’s premises and to terminate their lease agreements. The authorities informed me that the property in question belongs to the Municipality, which plans to take the relevant steps for its efficient use. However, currently,

the tenants continue to use the property on a preferential or free-of-charge lease basis, and there is no need for the media outlets to vacate the premises. These lease agreements will remain in force until the end of 2020 (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **3 October**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at, and requesting additional information on, the developments around the **Hayeli.am** and **Armlur.am** online media platforms. On 25 September, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia questioned the editors of both media platforms as witnesses, after they published articles, citing anonymous sources, related to the death of the former chief of Armenian police Hayk Harutyunyan. I reiterated my concern that such actions may have a chilling effect on the work of the media in the country, and recalled the importance of respecting the confidentiality of journalists' sources.

On 1 November, I received a reply from the authorities informing me of the circumstances under which the Investigative Committee interrogated the journalists. I was also informed that all necessary measures are being taken to investigate comprehensively and objectively the criminal case into the death of Harutyunyan.

Azerbaijan

On **13 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the Supreme Court decision rejecting the petition of the well-known investigative journalist and former local bureau chief for **RFE/RL**, **Khadija Ismayilova**, to have her probation period terminated early. I stated that her continued foreign travel ban is a serious hindrance on her professional activity as a journalist.

On **30 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the news that the journalist **Seymur Hazi** was finally free after having served his five-year imprisonment sentence (see also PC Report of 18 June 2015). I called for the release of all other journalists and bloggers imprisoned for their work in the country.

On 18 September, I learned that the prison sentence of the editor of the online news portal **Realliq.info**, **Ikram Rahimov**, who was sentenced to five-and-a-half-years in prison in June 2019 on extortion charges, was reduced to 3 years in appeal (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **23 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the detention of the **Voice of America's Azerbaijani Service** correspondent **Taptyg Guliyev** (Farhadoglu), for covering a protest in Baku. I stated that journalists must be able to cover public events without intimidation or detention.

On **25 September**, I wrote to the authorities, and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concern at the situation and health condition of the imprisoned investigative journalist **Afgan Mukhtarli**, who is currently serving a six-year prison term, as well as at the mistreatment of his lawyer Nemat Kerimli (see also PC Report of 5 July 2018).

According to reports, on 20 September 2019, prison authorities mistreated Kerimli by searching him and physically forcing him to hand over his written notes, during a visit with the journalist. In protest against this incident, **Mukhtarli** held a three-day hunger strike.

I called on the authorities to conduct a swift and transparent investigation into the reported actions of the prison authorities in relation to his lawyer Nemat Kerimli, as it bore the signs of a violation of the lawyer-client privilege of confidential communication. I further stated that it is of utmost importance to guarantee non-discriminatory and unimpeded access to legal counselling for **Mukhtarli** at all times, and called on the authorities to provide the journalist with urgent professional medical assistance, following reports that the hunger strike had resulted in the deterioration of his health.

On **22 October**, I issued a public statement deploring the obstruction of the work of journalists covering public protests in Baku. According to reports, on 19 and 20 October, journalists from various media outlets, including **Meydan TV**, **Radio Azadliq (RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service)**, **Turan news agency**, **Voice of America's Azerbaijani Service**, **Objective TV online channel**, **Azadliq newspaper**, **Toplum TV news platform**, and some freelance reporters, were mistreated, verbally assaulted and shortly detained by the police. I called on the authorities to take steps to ensure restraint on the part of law enforcement representatives towards the media.

Belarus

On **4 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the pardoning and release of the correspondent for Ukrainian national radio in Belarus, **Pavlo Sharoiko**, whose case I raised with the authorities in 2017 (see also PC Report of 5 July 2018).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

On **15 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the four-year prison sentence handed down to the attacker who severely beat up the journalist **Vladimir Kovačević**, in Banja Luka in August 2018. I expressed my hope that the second attacker would face justice too.

On **28 September**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **30 September** issued a joint public statement, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, condemning the attack on two journalists from **radiosarajevo.ba**. On 27 September, two individuals who objected to an article posted on the website threatened the journalists, by forcing them to retract it and to call other news portals and newspapers to ask them to remove the article. I urged the authorities to do their utmost so that all those involved in the attack face justice, and to ensure that journalists are able to perform their work in a safe environment.

On **24 October**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **25 October** issued a joint public statement, together with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kathleen Kavalec, strongly condemning the serious threats sent in a video message to the **Žurnal** website journalist **Avdo Avdić**, in relation to his investigative reporting. I called on the authorities to protect journalists and to do their utmost to bring the person responsible for the video to justice.

Bulgaria

On **8 July**, I wrote to the authorities requesting additional information regarding the opening of a criminal investigation in June this year against the **Bivol** journalists **Atanas Tchobanov**

and **Asen Yordanov**, who were being investigated by the police for an alleged real estate fraud.

I also referred to a separate case of 21 May, regarding the **Capital Weekly** journalist **Rossen Bossev**, who was convicted on charges of criminal defamation, after criticizing the former head of Bulgaria's Financial Supervision Commission. I urged the authorities to decriminalize defamation, and to consider **Bossev's** right to freedom of expression, as well as his role as a journalist, at his appeal.

On 9 August I received a reply to the above cases from the authorities, informing me that the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation filed the report on the **Bivol** journalists after receiving information concerning their alleged tax fraud. The case was still pending as of 9 August. I was also informed that **Bossev's** case had been referred to the competent authorities.

On **24 September**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the dismissal of the Bulgarian public radio broadcaster veteran journalist **Sylvia Velikova**, after she was taken off-air due to alleged political pressure, which, she claims, was related to her criticism of the appointment process of Bulgaria's next Prosecutor General. While I expressed my relief at her reinstatement, I asked the authorities to provide me with more information on the investigation into the circumstances surrounding this incident.

On 12 November, I received a reply from the authorities on the matter raised in my letter of 24 September. It noted that the Council of Electronic Media, the national media regulator, condemned the undue broadcast interruption of the program *Horizont* after its team was pressured to remove **Sylvia Velikova** from it. The Council also found that the interruption was made under bogus reasons and in fact violated constitutional values. As a result, the mandate of the director-general of the **Bulgarian National Public Radio (BNR)** was terminated and he has been replaced by an acting director as of 17 October until a new election to the post.

Canada

On **12 November**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the arson attack against the **Turtle Island News** media outlet, in Southern Ontario. On 28 October, a van was driven into the offices of the outlet, and subsequently set on fire. I called on the authorities to investigate fully and thoroughly the circumstances surrounding this targeted attack.

Croatia

On **30 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the bomb threat sent the previous day to the daily newspaper **Slobodna Dalmacija**. I underlined that such threats and pressure against the media and its editorial team are unacceptable, and called on the authorities to swiftly investigate and find the perpetrator.

On **17 September**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the lawsuits against, and detention of, the journalist, **Gordan Duhaček**, from the **Index.hr** news portal. According to media reports, he was under police investigation for two critical and satirical tweets he published on his personal account. He spent several hours in prison and was released later that day. I stressed that punishing journalists for sharing comments on social media hinders their right to express their free opinion, and encourages self-censorship to the detriment of media freedom in the country.

Cyprus

On **2 – 4 October**, I paid an official visit to **Cyprus**, during which I launched the second exchange opportunity for journalists from both Cypriot communities, organized by my Office as part of our Cyprus Media Dialogue project. (For more details, see Projects).

During my visit, I also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, and with the Government Spokesperson, Prodromos Prodromou, to present them with the new phase of my Office’s Cyprus Media Dialogue project. In our discussions, we agreed on the importance of safeguarding and promoting the value of freedom of the media. (For more details, see Visits).

Georgia

On 18 July, I noted the decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of **Rustavi 2 Broadcasting Company Ltd and Others v. Georgia**, which held that there had been no violation as far as the independence and impartiality of the judges of the Tbilisi City Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court were concerned. The case stems from the national court proceedings ordering a change in ownership of **Rustavi 2** (see also PC Report of 9 March 2017).

On **16 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the cyberattack against the **Pirveli TV channel**. This attack, I stated, highlighted the urgent need to protect Internet resources and infrastructures at all times as key components of media freedom.

On **13 September**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the developments around the founder of the **Mtavari Arkhi** television channel, **Nikoloz Gvaramia**. In July 2019, the new owners of the **Rustavi 2 Television Company** dismissed **Gvaramia** from the post of Director General.

According to reports, after the dismissal from **Rustavi 2**, the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia charged **Gvaramia** with abuse of power against the interests of the television company, which allegedly resulted in a financial loss for the channel.

I also noted that, in the aftermath of the change of ownership, several staff members of **Rustavi 2**, including some key journalists, were dismissed by the new management or left the channel after disagreeing with changes in editorial policy.

I urged the authorities to assess, in a thorough and transparent investigation, the charges brought against **Gvaramia**, in the context of their impact on the country's media freedom landscape and the work of the newly established television channel **Mtavari Arkhi**.

On **9 – 10 October**, my Office organized the 16th South Caucasus Media Conference in **Tbilisi**. During the two-day conference, journalists and representatives from the media, NGOs, and state representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as international experts, discussed the latest media freedom developments in the region, safety of journalists, and the impact of digitalization on news creation and sustainability of the media. The participants also debated the issue of disinformation and “fake news”, as well as the role of journalism in the digital age to promote access to quality and reliable information.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, and the First Vice Chair of the Parliament, Tamar Chugoshvili, to discuss the latest media freedom developments in the country, and areas in which my Office can provide assistance. I discussed with President Zourabichvili the safety of journalists, combating disinformation, the importance of media literacy, and the role of public service media. During my discussion with Minister Zalkaliani, we discussed combating disinformation, and support to quality information and media pluralism. (For more details, see Visits and Conferences).

On **15 October**, I wrote to the authorities and issued a statement from my official Twitter account, requesting additional information about, and expressing my concern at, the denial of entry to Georgia of the **Epress.am** online news agency journalists, **Yuri Manvelyan**, **Tigran Khachatryan**, and **Tigran Hakobyan**. According to reports, on 11 October, the journalists were denied entry at the border, when travelling from Armenia to visit Akhalsikhe, Akhalkalaki and the capital Tbilisi. I called on the authorities to facilitate the access of journalists coming from another OSCE participating State, as per OSCE commitments, including the Helsinki Final Act.

Greece

On **11 July**, I issued a public statement, and on **15 July** wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias, expressing my concern at the resignations of the Heads of the **Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT)** and the **Athens-Macedonian News Agency (ANA-MPA)**, **Yannis Drosos** and **Michalis Psilos**, respectively. These resignations came after a new presidential decree, published on 9 July 2019, placed **ERT** and **ANA-MPA** under the supervision of the prime minister. I recalled that any cuts in public funding, as well as changes in the appointment and reporting mechanisms of the top managers and board managers of the public service broadcaster and news agency need to be carefully assessed, in order to avoid impacting the work of the media.

On **24 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the arrest on 23 September of the photojournalist **Alexandros Stamatiou**, of the **Efymerida Ton Syntakton daily**, while he was covering a police operation.

Ireland

On **15 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the court decision sentencing to prison a man who harassed and threatened six female journalists and writers for their work. I stressed that online abuse is an unacceptable pressure on journalists and an attack on press freedom, and that there can be no impunity.

Italy

On **18 November**, I issued a public statement condemning the attempted murder of **Mario De Michele**, the editor of the **Campania Notizie**, on 14 November. According to reports, the journalist was shot at by two individuals while driving his car in the town of Gricignano d'Aversa, and escaped uninjured. The attack is believed to be linked to his articles on the local municipality, and activities of the Camorra, an organized mafia crime group. He had reportedly received threats in the past.

Kazakhstan

On **22 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I called on the authorities to investigate an attack against, and the intimidation of, journalists of **Radio Azattyk**, **Almaty.tv**, and **KazTAG** who tried to attend an NGO press conference in Almaty. I emphasized that journalists must be able to work in safety.

On **8 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision by the authorities to halt the introduction of an encryption certificate for mobile devices, which would have interfered with users' Internet traffic.

On **28 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the important decision of the Medeu district court of Almaty to lift the ban on the publication of the online media **Ratel.kz**, and to allow its Editor-in-Chief, **Marat Asipov**, to lead the team.

On **21 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the repeated detention of the **RFE/RL Kazakh Service** and **Radio Azattyk** correspondent, **Saniya Toiken**, while reporting on a public rally. I stressed the need to protect the work of journalists at all times.

On **14 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern over the ongoing appeal procedure of the editor and blogger **Armangedly Batyrbekov**, who was sentenced to 27 months in detention for defamation and insult.

On **15 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the resumption of online access to the news site **Ratel.kz** online. The website was taken offline following a court decision on 28 May 2018.

Kyrgyzstan

On **17 – 18 July**, my Office organized the 21st Central Asia Media Conference in **Bishkek**. The conference brought together over 120 participants, including media professionals, state agencies, civil society and academia to discuss issues related to media freedom and pluralism in times of digital transformation. The conference also addressed the regulation of online media and safety of journalists, as well as provided an overview of media freedom developments in the region.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Chingiz Aidarbekov, the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nuran Niyazaliev, and the Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism, Azamat Zhamankulov. The discussions focused on media freedom developments in the country, including court cases against journalists, the issue of access to information, and physical attacks against journalists. (For more details, see Visits and Conferences).

On **14 August**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the closure of the **Aprél TV station** in Bishkek, following a Special Forces operation in the city. I called on the authorities to review this decision, and to respect media freedom and diversity even in difficult situations.

On **30 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the violent attack by four unknown individuals against the **Kyrgyz RFE/RL** camera operator, **Aibek Kulchumanov**, in Osh, while filming with a drone. I stated that this attack and intimidation against a media worker is unacceptable, and called on the authorities to investigate the case thoroughly.

On 22 October, I received a letter from the authorities informing me that police registered the incident against **Kulchumanov** as a “robbery”. The authorities also informed me that **Kulchumanov’s** filming resulted in complaints by two individuals, who accused him of interfering in their private life, and that these complaints are under police consideration.

Malta

On **8 July**, I met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion of Malta, Carmelo Abela, in **Vienna**. We discussed the urgent need to conclude the investigation into the assassination of the Maltese journalist, **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, to ensure an end to impunity. I also raised the ongoing problem of the defamation cases inherited by her family, and reiterated my call for a public inquiry into her death.

On **17 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that three men had been charged with the murder of journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, and that this was an important step in the judicial process. I stated that there must be no impunity for this horrendous crime and that all the perpetrators and masterminds must face justice.

On **21 September**, I issued a public statement noting the public inquiry set up to investigate the death of investigative journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**. I also stated that the inquiry must be fully independent and impartial, in order to deliver justice for her family, colleagues and the whole of Maltese society.

On **14 – 16 October**, I paid an official visit to **Malta**, during which I commemorated the two-year anniversary of the murder of the investigative journalist, **Daphne Caruana Galizia**. During my visit, I met with her family at a memorial near the city of Bidnija, where she was killed. I met with the Foreign Minister of Malta, Carmelo Abela, the Minister of Justice, Owen Bonnici, and the Attorney General, Peter Grech, to discuss the ongoing investigation into the journalist’s murder, the need to ensure no impunity for all those involved in the crime, the importance of having a fully independent and impartial public inquiry, and the protection of journalists. I also discussed the ongoing problem of defamation cases that her family inherited from her after her death. I spoke at a press conference organized by Reporters Without Borders. (For more details, see Visits).

I also issued a joint public statement, together with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard. We called on the government to establish accountability for her murder, by ensuring that the investigations into her death are conducted in a prompt, effective, independent and impartial manner.

On **15 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the announcement of new terms of reference and composition of the board of the public inquiry

into **Daphne Caruana Galizia's** assassination. I recalled that this had been called for, and that it must be a step towards justice, no impunity, and safety of journalists.

On **20 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that I was following developments in the investigation on the murder of the leading investigative journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, after the arrest of a business man, owner of the 17 Black Company on which the journalist had published reports. I stressed that all those involved in her assassination must face justice.

Moldova

On **17 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the investigation launched against the Head of the **Sputnik Moldova** news agency, **Vladimir Novosadiuc**, after law enforcement authorities reportedly detained and questioned the journalist.

Montenegro

On **12 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that my Office would be closely following the appeal trial the next day of the journalist **Jovo Martinović**. He was convicted on 15 January 2019 to 18 months in prison on “membership in a criminal organization” and “drug trafficking” charges linked to his investigative media work (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On 25 October, I learned that the appeal court quashed the charges against **Martinović**, after the court ruled that the prosecution failed to produce sufficient evidence, but that he would face a retrial.

Netherlands

On **25 October**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the detention of the **NOS** journalist **Robert Bas**, who was held in custody to leverage him to disclose his communications with his sources. I called for his release, and urged the Dutch authorities to respect the confidentiality of journalists' communications and sources, which is a vital element of media freedom and recognized by international standards and OSCE commitments.

I later learned that the council chamber of the court overturned the order of the investigative judge and **Bas** was released from prison.

On **11 November**, I wrote to the Minister of Justice and Security, Ferdinand Grapperhaus, and the Chair of the Senate, Jan Anthonie Bruijn, and on **12 November** issued a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my concerns at the new legislative proposal on counterterrorism. The bill, which was being discussed in the Senate, would make it an offence for all Dutch citizens to travel to areas under the control of a terrorist organization without prior approval from the authorities. I called on the authorities to amend the legislative proposal to exempt journalists and media workers from its scope.

North Macedonia

On **25 September**, I wrote to the authorities, and on **26 September** issued a statement from my official Twitter account, stating that my Office would be closely following the case of **Aleksandar Mitovski**, the editor of the **Infomax** news website, who was charged with “disclosing an official secret” after publishing excerpts from a criminal prosecution report on the “Racketeering” case. I stressed that it is of paramount importance not to prosecute journalists because of their professional activities, particularly when reporting on issues of public interest.

Poland

On **1 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the violent attacks on the **OKO.press** journalists **Agata Kubis** and **Maciek Piasecki**, while they were covering a Pride parade in Lublin. I further stated that journalists must be able to report from public events without fear of violence.

Russian Federation

On **6 July**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **12 July** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at the decision by the Federal Financial Monitoring Service to investigate and include the **Radio Ekho Moskvyy** journalist **Svetlana Prokopyeva**, on a “list of terrorists and extremists” (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019). I called on the authorities to remove her name from this list, and not to label her as a terrorist. I further stated that this decision would affect her seriously and unjustly in her daily life and work, by limiting the use of financial services, such as access to a bank account, payments and withdrawal of money.

I also reiterated my call for the complete dropping of criminal charges against **Prokopyeva**, as reporting on a terrorist attack should not be equated with justification of terrorism, and the related restrictions may lead to a disproportionate interference with her freedom of expression.

On 8 July, I received a letter from the Chairman of the Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly, Senator Alexei Pushkov, and one from the Director of Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, regarding the denial of accreditation to journalists with the Russian media outlets, **RT** and **Sputnik**, to the Global Conference for Media Freedom, which was held from 10 to 11 July in London.

On 12 July, I received a letter dated 25 June from the Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Rights and Human Rights, Mikhail Fedotov, regarding an incident involving the crew of the television channel **Rossiya 24** in Tbilisi on 22 June 2019 (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **31 July**, I wrote to the Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Rights and Human Rights, Mikhail Fedotov, in reply to his letter of 25 June, regarding the incident involving the crew of the television channel **Rossiya 24** in Tbilisi on 22 June.

On **29 July**, I issued a public statement deploring a series of attacks against journalists and the obstruction of media activities during an election-related demonstration on 27 July in Moscow.

According to reports, on 27 July, at least 15 media workers working or contributing to various media outlets, including **Novaya Gazeta**, **RBK**, **The Associated Press**, **Meduza**, **Komsomolskaya Pravda**, **Deutsche Welle**, **MediaZona**, **The Village**, **Wikinews** and others, were assaulted, detained or had their equipment damaged by police while covering the public demonstration. I also noted that the Investigative Committee summoned and questioned the Editor-in-Chief of the **Dozhd** news channel, **Aleksandra Perepelova**, in relation to the media outlet's coverage of the rallies in the city. I called on the authorities to investigate all incidents involving journalists.

On **1 August**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my serious concern regarding the arrest of the journalist **Rashid Maysigov**, by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB). According to reports, on 12 July, in Nazran, in the Republic of Ingushetia, FSB officers detained **Maysigov** after raiding his home, where they allegedly found drugs and extremist leaflets. On 16 July, a district court placed **Maysigov** under pre-trial arrest for two months pending the FSB's investigation. The journalist, who previously contributed to the **Fortanga** online portal, denies any involvement in illegal activities. I urged the authorities to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation. **Maysigov's** detention was subsequently extended several times, with the latest extension until 7 January 2020.

On 19 November, I learned that the journalist was released from pre-trial detention and placed under house arrest.

On **5 August**, I wrote to the authorities raising the case of **The Barents Observer**, an independent online newspaper based in Norway, which covers news and developments in the Scandinavian countries and the Russian Federation. Reportedly, starting from 19 February 2019, access to **The Barents Observer** was blocked in Russia, after it declined to abide by demands by the media state regulator, Roskomnadzor, to remove an article about a Sámi homosexual man from northern Sweden. In addition, on 8 March 2017, the editor of **The Barents Observer**, **Thomas Nilsen**, was refused entry into Russia despite being in possession of valid travel documents and relevant accreditation.

I expressed my hope that a solution to the blocking of the online newspaper would be found, and requested additional information to clarify the reasoning behind these restrictive measures.

On 27 August, I received a letter from the authorities updating me on the case of the journalist and human rights defender **Natalya Estemirova**, who was abducted and killed in July 2009. According to the information provided by the Investigative Committee, law enforcement officials identified a suspect who they placed on an international wanted list for allegedly being involved in the commissioning of the crime. However, the whereabouts of the suspect were not established and, therefore, the investigation had to be discontinued. I was informed that the law enforcement authorities are continuing their efforts in establishing the whereabouts of the suspect.

On **7 September**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the release of the Ukrainian film director and writer **Oleg Sentsov**, from Crimea, of the correspondent of the **Ukrinform Ukrainian National News Agency**, **Roman Sushchenko**, and of the chief of the **RIA Novosti Ukraine** office in Kyiv, **Kirill Vyshinsky**, following the exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia. I recalled that I intervened on their behalf numerous times in the past (see also PC Reports of 5 July 2018, 22 November 2018 and 4 July 2019).

I also reiterated my call for the release of the blogger and contributor to the **Ukrainian Service of RFE/RL, Stanislav Aseev**, whom the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” forces detained at the beginning of June 2017, in Donetsk, and who has remained in custody since then.

On **30 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the State Duma Commission’s accusation that the German media outlet, **Deutsche Welle**, had violated Russian legislation, as well as the threats to strip it of its accreditation and to label it a “foreign agent”. I stated that this might negatively affect the work of all international media in Russia and have a strong chilling effect.

On **2 October**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my serious concern regarding the case of the citizen journalist **Nariman Memedeminov**, from Crimea, following a court ruling in the city of Rostov-on-Don sentencing him to two-and-a-half-years in a colony settlement on charges of “publicly calling for terrorism activities” (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

I noted reports, including from various human rights institutions, indicating that his videos in question did not contain any calls to terrorism, extremism and/or violence. I called on the authorities to drop the charges brought against **Memedeminov**.

On **2 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the search of the editorial office of the independent online newspaper, **Chernovik**, in Makhachkala. I called on the authorities to ensure that the media outlet can continue to work unimpeded.

On **3 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the blocking of the **Fergana Information Agency’s** website by the Federal Regulator, Roskomnadzor. I further stated that such restrictive measures should not impede the free flow of information online, and expressed my hope that the decision would be urgently reversed.

On **4 October**, I issued a public statement reiterating my call on the authorities to drop the criminal charges against the **Radio Ekho Moskvyy** journalist **Svetlana Prokopyeva**, indicted with “publicly condoning terrorism” (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019). I reiterated this call after a statement was published by Russia’s Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, which stated that its Standing Committee on Freedom of Information and the Rights of Journalists did not find any signs of condoning terrorism in the case.

On **5 October**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the disproportionate punishment against the blogger **Vladislav Sinitsa**, following the decision by the Moscow City Court, on 4 October, to uphold his imprisonment in appeal.

Earlier, in September 2019, after a single hearing, the Presnensky District Court of Moscow sentenced **Sinitsa** to five years in prison after finding him guilty, under Russia’s anti-extremism legislation, of inciting hatred and threatening violence against a “social group” (law enforcement personnel) in a tweet. According to the prosecution, the tweet contained calls for reprisals against the children of law enforcement officers.

I stated that, even in cases where restrictions to freedom of expression can apply, the principle of proportionality must be respected and taken into consideration, in accordance with

international standards, and that the five-year prison sentence for a tweet is a very harsh and disproportionate punishment. I called on the authorities to review carefully the sentence against the blogger.

On **9 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the restoration of access to the **Fergana Information Agency's** website, on which I intervened on 3 October (see above).

On **17 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the wave of law enforcement raids carried out against journalists from the online publication **29.ru**, the news website **Keytown.me**, **RFE/RL's Idel Realii**, and the **Dovod** news agency, and who were also questioned and had their equipment seized. I called on the authorities to ensure respect for the activities of these media.

On **6 November**, my Office organized a conference on “Freedom of the media and safety of journalists in the Russian Federation and in the OSCE region: Challenges and opportunities in the digital age” in **Moscow**, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. I opened the conference together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov. Speakers included Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, and journalists from different media outlets, including **Ivan Golunov of Meduza**, **Igor Rudnikov of Noviye Kolyosa**, **Nadezhda Prusenkova of Novaya Gazeta**, **Elena Chernenko of Kommersant**, **Damian Kudryavtsev of Vedomosti**, **Victoria Polikarpova of Sputnik**, and **Anna Knishenko of RT**, among others.

The conference, the first such one organized by my Office in Russia, gathered over 200 participants representing media professionals, political representatives, academics, civil society, renowned international experts, including from prominent press freedom NGOs, and journalists to address media freedom developments and challenges across the OSCE region.

Participants discussed the current state of media freedom and media pluralism in Russia and the OSCE region; new challenges and responses to safety of journalists; “fake news” and disinformation: how to tackle them, including through Internet regulation and international standards on freedom of expression; and media self-regulation, fact-checking and the role of journalism, ethical standards and media literacy.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, the Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Press and Information Department, Maria Zakharova, and the Chair of the Committee on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Federal Council, Alexei Pushkov. We discussed the safety of journalists and legislations that have an impact on media freedom, such as anti-extremism legislation, the laws on the Internet, the laws on “disrespect” to the state and on the spread of “fake news”, and the Foreign Agent Law. I also raised individual cases of journalists and media workers. (For more details, see Visits and Conferences).

On 8 November, I received a letter from the authorities, with an address by journalists from Crimea. In the address, the journalists expressed their view about the state of the media freedom situation in a number of OSCE participating States.

On 12 November, I learned that a court in Makhachkala, the Republic of Dagestan, extended the arrest of journalist **Abdulmumin Gadzhiev**, from the independent online newspaper **Chernovik**, until 13 January 2020 (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On 13 November, I received a letter from the authorities regarding reports about the launching of criminal proceedings in Ukraine against **Vladimir Soloviev**, a Russian journalist working for the **Rossiya 1** TV channel, for his statements on the situation in Ukraine. Reportedly, the proceedings were launched on suspicion that the statements infringed on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, following the appeal of one of the members of Verkhovna Rada.

On **20 November**, I issued a public statement reiterating my call on the Russian parliament to withdraw the draft law which extends the status of a “media outlet - foreign agent” to individuals. The draft law, which passed its second reading on 19 November, allows government authorities to label individuals as “foreign agents” if they publish (off- or online) information, like written texts or audiovisual material, for a broader public and receive any funding or other assets from foreign or international governmental and non-governmental sources. It would also impose significant administrative burdens upon the concerned individuals and media organizations. It would also tighten the punishment for non-compliance with the new regulations, including by immediate blocking of access to the online materials, when information is disseminated without the notification of having originated from a “foreign agent”.

I said that this draft law represents a disproportionate interference with the freedom of expression and media freedom, and that it may have a considerable chilling effect on journalists, as well as on bloggers, experts, or other individuals publishing information, particularly online.

Serbia

On **18 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I strongly condemned the insults and threats by the Serbian politician Vojislav Šešelj against the **Danas** journalist **Snežana Čongradin**, for an article she wrote.

On **29 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the physical attacks and threats against **N1** and **Federalna TV** journalists by football fans in Belgrade while reporting the previous day. I called on the authorities to condemn these attacks and prosecute the perpetrators.

On **7 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the break-in of the family home of the **KRIK** journalist **Milica Vojinović**, on 4 October. I welcomed the launch of the police investigation into the case, expressing my hope that the perpetrators would be sanctioned, and stressed the importance of determining if the break-in was related to her work.

On **18 October**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at an incident against the **N1 TV channel** in Belgrade. On 14 October, two unknown individuals threw several hundred leaflets into the yard of the **N1** premises, which stated “Goodbye Republic of Serbia, N1 Welcome to Luxembourg”. I welcomed the swift reaction by the police, and urged them to identify and bring the perpetrators to justice.

On **7 November**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **8 November** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at another targeting of **N1** during a recent TV interview. I also found worrisome the threats to the **Večernje Novosti** journalist **Jelena Stojković**. I called on Serbian authorities to condemn these incidents and to conduct proper investigations

Slovakia

On **19 September**, I issued a public statement calling on the authorities to repeal the controversial amendments to the Slovak Press Act, which established a right of reply for political leaders and public figures. The Act had that week passed through the second reading in parliament. The President signed the amendments into law in October 2019. In March 2019, my Office had provided the authorities with a legal review of the proposed amendments that recommended, in particular, keeping the provisions that restrict the right of reply of political leaders and public figures (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **20 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that it is incomprehensible that the Slovak former chief of police is engaging in a personal smear campaign against the investigative media outlet **Aktuality.sk**, which the journalist **Ján Kuciak** previously worked at before he was killed. I emphasized that such a campaign is shameful and unacceptable.

Spain

On 16 July, I received a letter from the authorities referring to the case of two Spanish journalists from **Europa Press Baleares** and **Diario de Mallorca**, which I raised in December 2018, informing me that the case did not subsist, as the competent judicial authorities had decided to open a proceeding on the decision leading to the case, and that, by that time, all materials had been returned to the journalists (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **7 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the vicious attack on the journalist **Laila Jiménez** by protesters on 2 October, in Barcelona. I stated that journalists must be able to report freely from public demonstrations, without fear of violence or harassment.

On **22 October**, I issued a public statement and wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern over several violent incidents and attacks against journalists over the previous week, after protests started on 14 October in Barcelona. According to reports, at least 21 journalists were injured throughout the week, from such outlets as **France 24**, **Eldiario.es**, **La Directa magazine**, **The Associated Press**, **El Mundo**, and **Fotomovimiento**, among others, despite identifying themselves as members of the press. In addition, police arrested the **El País** photojournalist **Albert Garcia**, on 18 October, before releasing him the next day.

On **7 November**, I issued a public statement condemning the targeting of six journalists, after posters and leaflets appeared on the streets of Barcelona, on 6 November, calling the journalists “traitors” and “information terrorists at the service of Ibex” referring to large corporate financial companies. They included the journalists **Xavier Sardà**, a contributor to **El Periódico** and the TV station **La Sexta**, **Joan Guirado** from **OkDiario**, **Mayka Navarro** from **La Vanguardia**, **Xavier Rius** of **E-notícies**, **Laura Fàbregas** of **Crónica Global**, and **Estefanía**

Molina from the TV station **La Sexta**. I called on the authorities to investigate the threats thoroughly, and welcomed the condemnation by the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez.

On 12 November, I received a reply from the authorities in response to my letter of 22 October informing me that there had been no complaints or claims made by journalists regarding alleged aggressions. A complaint was filed against the **El País** photojournalist **Albert Garcia**, for allegedly attacking authority and public disorder, which is being duly investigated. I was informed that there had been no irregularities regarding the use of rubber bullets, and that the use of force by the security forces was legitimate and proportionate.

In addition, the authorities referred to my public statement of 7 November, and assured me of their willingness to co-operate with my Office.

Tajikistan

On **23 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the difficulties faced by employees of **RFE/RL**, and its Tajik-language service **Ozodi**, with their accreditations. I called on the authorities to find a solution, and stated that accreditations should not be used as a work permit or authorization to work as a journalist.

On **1 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the granting of accreditation to seven members of staff of **RFEL/RL's Radioi Ozodi** service. I expressed my hope that accreditation would be issued to other members of the team, so that they can carry out their work unhindered.

On **15 November**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern about the recent decision of the National Bank of Tajikistan to update the “national list of persons connected with terrorism (individuals)” with at least six names of journalists. I appealed to the authorities to remove the names of the journalists from the list, and to review this policy that exposes media professionals to danger and reprisals.

Turkey

On **16 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that my Office would be closely following the trial of the journalist **Erol Önderoğlu**, as well as the freelance journalist **Ahmet Nesin**, and the human rights defender **Şebnem Korur Fincancı**, who were facing four-and-a-half-years in prison for showing solidarity with the now-closed Kurdish media outlet **Özgür Gündem**. I called on the authorities to acquit them.

On **17 July**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the acquittal of the Turkish journalists **Erol Önderoğlu** and **Ahmet Nesin**, as well as the human rights defender **Şebnem Korur Fincancı**. The charges brought against them included engaging in terrorist propaganda and supporting criminal activity.

On **19 July**, I issued a public statement welcoming the prison sentences handed down to seven people over the murder of the Turkish-Armenian journalist **Hrant Dink**. **Dink**, the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the **Agos Magazine**, was shot dead in front of his office in Istanbul on 19 January 2007. I expressed my hope that all others involved in this murder would face justice.

On **19 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the judiciary's request to acquit 12 **Cumhuriyet** trial defendants. I called for the immediate release and dismissal of charges against all **Cumhuriyet** media workers, and stressed that holding views or reporting on issues of public interest must not be criminalized.

On **6 August**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, expressing my deep concern at the blocking of 136 news sites and social media accounts in the country, following a request made by the Gendarmerie General Command. One of the URLs included in the verdict made by the Ankara 3rd Penal Court of Peace was **Bianet.org**, a well-known news website and information resource. I called on the authorities to review this decision and respect freedom of expression and independent media.

On **8 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I recognized the important decision by the authorities in lifting the ban on **Bianet.org**. However, I noted that many other news sites remained blocked and censored.

On **28 August**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the detention of several journalists, following public demonstrations in several Turkish cities triggered by the removal of several mayors in south-east Turkey. The journalist **Ziyan Karahan**, who works for the Kurdish service of the **Mezopotamya News Agency**, and the **Jinnews** reporter **Yelda Özbek**, were both detained in Diyarbakır on 19 and 20 August, respectively, and were subsequently released a few days later. Also on 20 August, the correspondents of the **Mezopotamya News Agency**, **Ahmet Kanbal** and **Mehmet Şah Oruç**, as well as the **Jinnews** reporter, **Rojda Aydın**, and the journalists, **Nurcan Yalçın** and **Halime Parlak**, were taken into custody by the police in Mardin, and later released on 27 August.

In addition, on 22 August, the police detained in Istanbul **Taylan Özgür Öztaş**, a reporter for the **Özgür Gelecek** newspaper, and **Tunahan Turhan**, a reporter for the **Etkin news agency**. The police also took the writer and columnist for the **Evrensel Daily**, **Ayşegül Tözeren**, into custody on 20 August, following a midnight raid on her Istanbul home. The police released all three of them from custody under judicial control measures on 23 August.

On **30 August**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **31 August** issued a public statement, condemning the shooting of the journalist **Levent Uysal**. During the night of 28 August, **Uysal**, the former owner of the now-closed newspaper, **Yenigün**, was shot in the leg by two perpetrators outside his home in the city of Balıkesir in north-west Turkey, and was immediately hospitalized.

I expressed my concern at the multiplication of violent incidents against journalists in the country, as this was the sixth grave attack since May this year. I also stressed that more needs to be done to ensure that this deeply concerning trend is urgently reversed and that journalists are ensured a safe environment to work in.

On **11 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the acquittal and lifting of the international travel ban of the Austrian journalist **Max Zirngast**, and stated that journalists should never be imprisoned for their work. He was arrested on 11 September 2018, and spent three months in prison on alleged terrorism related charges (see also PC Report of 22 November 2018).

On **12 September**, I issued two statements from my official Twitter account, and on **13 September** issued a public statement, expressing my relief at the reversal of the sentences of seven former **Cumhuriyet** journalists, including **Musa Kart, Güray Öz, Hakan Kara, Önder Çelik**, and **Mustafa Kemal Güngör**. They had previously been re-sent to prison in April this year. In addition, the journalist, **Kadri Gürsel**, and the lawyer, **Bülent Utku**, who had previously been released, also had their sentences reversed.

However, as the former **Cumhuriyet** accountant, **Emre İper**, was sentenced to remain in jail, I repeated my call on the authorities to release all other journalists and media workers imprisoned for their work.

On **13 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the five month suspended sentences against the media lawyer **Veysel Ok**, and the journalist **Cihan Acar**, for their criticism of the Turkish Judiciary.

On **24 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my relief at the acquittal of Reporters Without Borders' Turkey Representative **Erol Önderoğlu**, who was accused of "terrorist propaganda" over his participation in a solidarity campaign with university academics.

On **25 September**, I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern at the arrest of **Ziya Ataman** from the now-closed **Dicle News Agency**. On 24 September, the Şırnak 1st Heavy Penal Court convicted **Ataman** to 14 years and three months in prison on charges of "membership of a terrorist organization". Police initially arrested **Ataman** on 11 April 2016 and detained him at the Van High Security Closed Prison, for a duration far exceeding the upper limit for his arrest.

I reiterated that journalists should not be prosecuted or face imprisonment on terrorism charges because of their professional activities, or for reporting and expressing their views, even on sensitive issues. I also called on the authorities to release all journalists sentenced to prison because of their work or critical views.

On **9 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that my Office would be closely following the retrial of six defendants, including **Mehmet Altan, Ahmet Altan** and **Nazlı Ilıcak**, who had been handed life sentences that were later overturned by the Supreme Court of Appeals. I expressed my hope that all of them would be acquitted at the next hearing due to take place on 4 November.

On **10 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the detention of the editor of the **BirGün** daily website, **Hakan Demir**, in Istanbul and the police raid on his home. **Demir** was allegedly detained for reporting on a military operation in Syria. I urged the authorities to release him and to let journalists report freely on the situation.

Later that day, I learned that **Demir** was released on probation and banned from travelling abroad.

On **14 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern after two journalists were injured in a sniper attack in Nusaybin close to the Turkish-Syrian border on 11 October, and the potential deportation of the **Al Arabiya** journalist **Zidane Zenglow**. I

added that all actors in a conflict are responsible for protecting journalists under UN Security Council Resolutions 1738 and 2222.

On **23 October**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the police raid conducted on 22 October on the home of the human rights lawyer **Eren Keskin**, as well as the detention, on 23 October, of the **Net News Agency** reporter **Emre Orman**, in connection with their social media posts.

On 31 October, I learned that **Emre Orman** was released from detention.

On **25 October**, I issued a public statement welcoming the release of several journalists, following the new judicial reform strategy that entered into force the previous day. These included the journalists of the now-closed **Dicle News Agency (DIHA)**, **Meltem Oktay** and **Uğur Akgül**, as well as the former Editor-in-Chief of **Özgür Gündem**, **Hüseyin Aykol**, and the former **Cumhuriyet** accountant **Emre İper**.

On **4 November**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the release of the journalists **Ahmet Altan**, **Mehmet Altan** and **Nazlı Ilıcak**. The Istanbul 26th High Criminal Court ruled to acquit **Mehmet Altan** due to a lack of evidence. The court also decided to sentence **Ahmet Altan** and **Nazlı Ilıcak** to 10 years and six months, and eight years and nine months in prison, respectively, for “aiding a terrorist group without being its member”. However, taking into account the time they already spent in jail, the court released both of them on probation. I called on the authorities to end the criminal prosecution of all journalists, and to ensure that they can work in a free environment.

On **12 November**, I wrote to the authorities, urging them not to re-arrest the journalist **Ahmet Altan**. According to reports, on 6 November, the prosecutor requested the re-arrest of **Altan** on the grounds that his travel ban does not constitute a strong enough form of judicial control. He had been previously released on 4 November.

Later, on **12 November**, I issued a public statement expressing my deep concern regarding the re-arrest of the journalist and writer **Ahmet Altan**. I stressed that arresting **Altan** again is a terrible setback and a reason for serious concern, especially when taking into account the length of the judicial process against him and the fact that he has already spent three years in pre-trial detention. I repeated my call to reverse this decision and ensure that journalists are protected and free to do their job.

On **14 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the acquittal of the Editor-in-Chief of **Evrensel Daily**, **Fatih Polat**, who was charged with insulting the President in one of his writings. I stated that all journalists in Turkey should be free to work without pressure and reiterated my call to change Criminal Code article 299.

On **14 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my alarm at the detention of journalist **Canan Coşkun** and documentary maker **Kazım Kızıl**, reportedly in relation to their investigative work. I called for their immediate release and for their rights to be fully respected.

On **18 November**, I wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, informing him about several developments in the country. On 13 November, journalist **Canan Coşkun** and documentary maker **Kazım Kızıl** were detained, reportedly in relation to their

investigative work. According to latest reports, they were released on probation after providing a testimony. I shared my concerns regarding terrorism-related charges against the prominent writer and human rights defender **Fikret Başkaya**. I also welcomed the acquittal of the Editor-in-Chief of **Evrensel Daily**, **Fatih Polat**, who was facing charges of “insulting the President” in a news article published in 2017.

Ukraine

On **13 July**, I issued a public statement condemning the grenade attack on the office building of the **TV channel 112 Ukraine** in Kyiv. On 12 July, an unknown person shot at the premises of the channel with a grenade launcher. Law enforcement officials stated that nobody was injured and that they had launched a criminal case on terrorism charges. I called on the authorities to investigate thoroughly this attack and to bring those responsible to justice.

On 21 August, I received a reply from the authorities informing me that, following the attack on the office building, the Main Investigative Unit of the Security Service of Ukraine launched a pre-trial investigation on terrorism charges, in order to identify the full circumstances surrounding the case and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On **15 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my hope that the court hearing in Kyiv on 19 July would result in the release of the bureau chief of **RIA Novosti Ukraine**, **Kirill Vyshinsky**. I stated that his lasting pre-trial detention is of serious concern, and reiterated my call on the authorities to release him.

On **19 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my disappointment after a court extended the pre-trial detention of the journalist **Kirill Vyshinsky**, for two more months, and reiterated my call on the authorities to release him.

On **20 July**, on the third anniversary of the murder of the journalist **Pavel Sheremet**, I issued a public statement reiterating my call on the authorities to step up their efforts in ending impunity for attacks on, and murders of, journalists.

On **1 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attack on the press center of the **Ukrinform** news agency on 30 July in Kyiv, in which several media workers were attacked and had their equipment damaged. I called on the authorities to investigate fully this incident and to prosecute the attackers.

On 7 August, I received a reply from the authorities regarding the cases of the attacked journalists **Vadim Komarov** and **Vadim Makaryuk** (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019). In **Komarov**'s case, the authorities informed me that the National Police of Ukraine had launched a pre-trial investigation and was carrying out the relevant investigative actions. In **Makaryuk**'s case, the investigation presented charges to three suspects, and the pre-trial investigation continues.

On **7 August**, I issued a public statement expressing my disappointment at a court ruling fining **Hromadske TV** for branding a nationalist organization as “neo-Nazi”. The Commercial Court of Kyiv ruled that **Hromadske TV** lacked sufficient evidence when it published a tweet referring to C14, a far-right Ukrainian NGO, as a “neo-Nazi” organization. The tweet was published on 4 May 2018, after which C14 filed suit against the media outlet for defamation, because it reportedly “harmed the reputation” of the NGO. In the court decision, the judge ruled

that **Hromadske TV** must retract its statement and pay a fine of up to UAH 3,500 (EUR 122). I stated that this court decision sets a harmful precedent in the country, and could have a dissuading effect on journalistic work.

On **16 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the cyberattack against the **Black Sea TV and Radio Company**. This attack, I stated, highlighted the urgent need to protect Internet resources and infrastructures at all times as key components of media freedom.

On **28 August**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the Appeals Court of Kyiv ruling to release from pre-trial detention the chief of **RIA Novosti Ukraine**, **Kirill Vyshinsky**. I called for the dropping of all charges against him, and for the release of all other detained journalists and authors in the OSCE region, in particular **Roman Sushchenko** and **Oleg Sentsov** in Russia.

On **30 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the police search of the offices of the public service broadcaster and the homes of several of its managers, including its Chairperson **Zurab Alasania**. I called on the authorities to refrain from exerting any pressure on the independence of public media.

On **7 September**, I issued a public statement, in addition to a statement from my official Twitter account, welcoming the release of the Ukrainian film director and writer, **Oleg Sentsov**, from Crimea, of the correspondent of the **Ukrinform Ukrainian National News Agency**, **Roman Sushchenko**, and of the chief of the **RIA Novosti Ukraine** office in Kyiv, **Kirill Vyshinsky**, following the exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia. I recalled that I intervened on their behalf numerous times in the past (see also PC Reports of 5 July 2018, 22 November 2018 and 4 July 2019).

I also reiterated my call for the release of the blogger and contributor to the **Ukrainian Service of RFE/RL**, **Stanislav Aseev**, whom the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” forces detained at the beginning of June 2017, in Donetsk, and who has remained in custody since then.

On **30 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the death threats reportedly sent to members of the **Bellingcat Monitoring Project** team, who were writing about the far-right in Ukraine. I called on the authorities to conduct a swift investigation, bring all those responsible to justice, and ensure journalists’ safety.

On **30 September**, I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the decision taken by the media regulator, the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine, not to renew the digital terrestrial broadcasting licenses of five regional television companies that broadcast the **112 Ukraine TV channel**. I expressed my hope that the Council would find a solution to preserve pluralism in the media environment. I also stated that it is important to ensure diversity in the broadcasting sphere, while fully respecting all legal requirements, and balancing any regulatory decisions with access to pluralistic media.

On **22 October**, I issued a public statement strongly condemning the jailing of the Ukrainian journalist, writer and blogger, **Stanislav Aseev**, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of extremism, espionage and public calls for encroaching on the “Donetsk People’s Republic’s” territorial integrity. **Aseev**, a contributor to various media, including the

Ukrainian Service of RFE/RL, has been detained since June 2017 (see also PC Reports of 22 November 2018 and 5 July 2018). I reiterated my call for his immediate release, as well as that of all journalists in the region, including **RFE/RL** contributor **Oleh Halaziuk**.

On **26 October**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **31 October** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at the court decision on 17 October granting investigators wide-ranging access to the communications and internal data of “Schemes”, a joint investigative project of **RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service** and the public service company **UA:PBC**. I called on the authorities to respect journalists’ work and the confidentiality of their sources.

On 12 November, the Kyiv Appellate Court overturned the lower court's ruling to allow investigators access to the editorial communications and other data of journalists working for the “Schemes” investigative project. The appellate court also ruled that the law enforcement’s request to obtain such access must be reviewed again by the same lower court.

On **8 November**, I issued a statement from my official Twitter account, and on **12 November** wrote to the authorities, expressing my concern at the search, on 7 November, of the home of the owner of **TV Priamij, Volodymyr Makeyenko**, in Kyiv. While the investigators said the search was in relation to alleged tax evasion, some NGOs linked the search to the editorial policy of the outlet. I called on the investigators to respect freedom of the media.

On **12 November**, I wrote to the authorities asking for information regarding the decree signed by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, on 8 November “On urgent measures for implementation of reforms and strengthening of the state”. The decree, among other issues, tasks the Cabinet of Ministers to develop and refer to parliament for consideration the draft laws with provisions regulating media activities in the country, by 31 December 2019. I offered my Office’s assistance in commissioning an expert assessment of the prospective amendments, and in providing relevant policy recommendations in line with international standards and OSCE media freedom principles.

On **14 November**, I wrote to the authorities asking for information regarding reports about the launching of criminal proceedings in Ukraine against **Vladimir Soloviev**, a Russian journalist working for the **Rossiya 1** TV channel, for his statements on the situation on Ukraine. Reportedly, the proceedings were launched on suspicion that the statements infringed on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, following the appeal of one of the members of the Verkhovna Rada.

United Kingdom

On **29 July**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the cyberattack against the investigative media outlet **Bellingcat** and its journalist **Christo Grozev**, among others, and called on the authorities to investigate fully these unacceptable attacks.

On **7 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the Metropolitan Police’s attempt to force the **BBC**, **ITN**, **Sky News**, and **The Times** to disclose unpublished materials from interviews with the British-born woman Shamima Begum, after she had travelled to Syria. I affirmed that respect for confidentiality of journalistic sources is important for media freedom.

On **18 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I deplored the violent attack against **The Guardian** columnist **Owen Jones** on 17 August, and called on the authorities to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice. I further stated that such attacks are unacceptable and pose a threat to media freedom.

On **30 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the arrest of three individuals in connection with the assault on **The Guardian** columnist **Owen Jones**. I also expressed my hope that due process would follow and that there would be no impunity for the violent attack against him.

On **4 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the court ruling in favour of the **BBC**, **ITN**, **Sky News** and **The Times** safeguarding the confidentiality of journalistic sources in relation to the Shamima Begum case (see above). I noted that this ruling sets an important precedent for press freedom and the protection of journalistic sources.

United States of America

On **6 August**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the 20-year prison sentence handed down to the man responsible for sending explosive devices to **CNN** offices and political figures in 2018. I stated that this sentence sends a clear signal that threats against journalists will not be tolerated and that media freedom needs to be protected.

Uzbekistan

On 22 July, I received a letter from Komil Allamjonov, the Acting Director of the Agency for Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, confirming the desire of the authorities to work closely with my Office in furthering freedom of the media in the country.

On **19 September**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at the sentencing of the blogger **Nodirbek Hojimatov**, to 10 days in prison for a Facebook post calling on the President to investigate local corruption. I called for his release, stressing that this sentence compromises his freedom of expression.

On **21 October**, I sent a legal review to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdulaziz Kamilov, on the draft law “**On Television and Radio Broadcasting**”. The review was prepared by Mr. Dmitry Golovanov, a legal expert from the Russian Federation. Having analyzed the draft law in the context of the international standards on freedom of expression, the expert came to the general conclusion that the draft law demonstrates progress in the development of legislation on television and radio broadcasting, and its direction towards harmonization with the principles of international law and international standards. At the same time, despite the correct basic principles being laid down, as well as some obvious and very significant advantages, the draft contains potentially negative provisions for freedom of the media includes a number of provisions that contradict each other. (For more details, see Legal reviews).

On 25 October, I received a letter from Komil Allamjonov, the Acting Director of the Agency for Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, conveying concerns raised by the Uzbek authorities regarding the editorial policies of **Radio Ozodlik** (Uzbek service of RFE/RL). My Office previously held a

meeting with Allamjonov on 25 June this year to discuss the matter (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **12 November**, I wrote to Komil Allamjonov, in reply to his letter of 25 October, expressing my hope that the situation regarding **RFE/RL** would soon be satisfactorily resolved, and conveying the readiness of my Office to closely co-operate with the authorities in organizing the second Central Asia Judicial Dialogue.

On **18 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern at reports of threats by a high-level official towards the journalists of the **Kun news agency**. I welcomed the prosecutor office's swift reaction on the matter, and expressed my hope that they would look into it and ensure journalists' safety.

3. Activities since the last report

Legal reviews

Albania

On **11 July**, following several consultations on the drafting process with government representatives, I published a legal review, prepared by Dr. Joan Barata Mir an independent media freedom expert, on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media in Albania**”. Besides mentioning the progress that has been achieved since previous versions, I stressed that the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) should not substitute the independent judiciary or self-regulatory mechanisms on issues of freedom of expression. This also applies for the blocking of content, fines for breaches of the law and the modalities of the right to reply. I emphasized that it is necessary that this legislation respects international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression.

On **22 July**, I wrote to the Prime Minister, Edi Rama, and on **23 July** issued a public statement, presenting an updated legal review on the amendments to the “**Law on Audiovisual Media in Albania**”, to the “**Law on Electronic Communications**” and other relevant provisions regarding the regulation of certain types of online content provided through the Internet. I expressed my hope that our modifications would be introduced during the parliamentary process. I noted that important improvements had been made: the new drafts of the Law on Audiovisual Media incorporated new provisions that better define the object and scope of the law, mentioned the need for the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA) to respect international and regional standards in its decisions, and it included a specific adaption of the right to reply to the new environment of electronic publications. Also, some problematic provisions regarding, for instance, domain name registration and blocking of online content, had been removed. However, as I pointed out, several remaining issues still needed to be addressed. The legal review proposed to amend article 132/1: an article that gives the AMA the power to oblige electronic publications service providers to publish an apology, remove content or insert a pop-up notice in cases of violations of provisions of the draft law. This is especially troublesome when it comes to the broadly phrased new article 33/1 (which mentions the “respect of privacy and dignity of citizens”), granting the AMA extensive new powers that could negatively impact the freedom of expression.

On 11 September, representatives from my Office met with the Deputy Secretary General of the Director of the Regulatory and Compliance Department of the Prime Minister’s Office, Elira Kokona, and the Director of Communications of the Council of Ministers, Endri Fuga, to discuss the latest legal suggestions shared by my Office. On 12 September, I met with the Albanian Member of Parliament and Secretary of Committee on Legal Affairs, Klotilda Ferhati, for a discussion on the draft media legislation in Albania, in view of building legislation in accordance with OSCE commitments and best international media standards.

On 1 – 2 October, an independent expert, Peter Noorlander, in close co-ordination with Dr. Joan Barata Mir and together with a representative from my Office, visited Tirana to hold several meetings with the local authorities, and to participate in technical discussions related to the previous recommendations made by my Office. The consultations continued on the drafting of legislation.

Uzbekistan

On **21 October**, I presented a legal review to the authorities on the draft law “**On Television and Radio Broadcasting**”. The review was prepared by Mr. Dmitry Golovanov, a legal expert from the Russian Federation.

Having analyzed the draft law in the context of international standards on freedom of expression, the expert came to the general conclusion that the draft law demonstrates progress in the development of legislation on television and radio broadcasting, and its direction towards harmonization with the principles of international law and international standards. At the same time, despite the correct basic principles being laid down, as well as some obvious and very significant advantages, the draft contains potentially negative provisions for freedom of the media and includes a number of provisions that contradict each other.

The main recommendations are to provide the necessary level of guarantees for public broadcasting organizations; abandon functioning of governmental channels; eliminate unnecessary restrictions for foreign broadcasters; ensure the independence of the regulatory body (Council); review certain licensing provisions, rules on abuse of freedom of broadcasting, as well as the rules that exclude the liability of broadcasters for distributing illegal content in certain cases.

Publications

On **10 July**, I launched the 20th Joint Declaration on freedom of expression, together with other international rapporteurs, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Lawrence Murugu Mute. We focused on the challenges to freedom of expression foreseen in the next decade.

The full text of the Joint Declaration is available at: <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/425282>

Visits, meetings and participation in events

On **8 July**, I met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion of Malta, Carmelo Abela, in **Vienna**. We discussed the investigation into the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, the need to ensure that there will be no impunity for all those involved in this horrendous crime, as well as the ongoing defamation cases inherited by her family, and the public inquiry into her death.

On **9 July**, I attended OSCE Informal Ministerial Gathering organized by the Slovak Chairmanship in the **High Tatras**, Slovakia.

On **10 – 12 July**, I attended the **Global Conference for Media Freedom in London**, co-organized by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Canada, where I addressed a Plenary Session.

During the conference, I launched the 20th Joint Declaration on freedom of expression, together with other international rapporteurs, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Lawrence Murugu Mute. We focused on the challenges to freedom of expression foreseen in the next decade.

On the margins of the conference, my Office screened our SOFJO documentary "A Dark Place". I also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, with whom I discussed media freedom issues and reforms in Uzbekistan and areas of co-operation with my Office; and with the German Foreign Office State Secretary, Michelle Müntefering, with whom I exchanged views on media freedom issues across the OSCE region and safeguarding freedom of expression online. I met with several journalists and representatives of NGOs.

On **15 July**, my Office spoke on the topic of "international law on disinformation in the media", at the International Media Law Summer School in **Kyiv**. The Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law organized the event.

On **16 – 18 July**, I paid an official visit to **Kyrgyzstan**, on the occasion of the 21st Central Asia Media Conference organized by my Office in Bishkek. During my visit, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Chingiz Aidarbekov, the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nuran Niyazaliev, and the Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism, Azamat Zhamankulov. The discussions focused on court cases against journalists, the issue of access to information, and physical attacks against journalists. (For more details, see Conferences).

On **17 July**, my Office spoke on the topic of "international law on disinformation in the media", at the second Boris Nemtsov International Summer School of Journalism and Cultural Studies at Charles University in **Prague**. The Boris Nemtsov Academic Center for the Study of Russia organized the event.

On **19 July**, I met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Lasha Darsalia, in **Vienna**. We discussed the current situation and media freedom developments in Georgia, including the incidents against journalists and the media that took place on 20 June this year (see also PC Report of 4 July 2019).

On **25 – 27 July**, I travelled to **Washington, D.C.**, where, in Congress, I addressed the **U.S. Helsinki Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe** in a hearing on the state of media freedom in the OSCE region, in the presence of Representative **Alcee L. Hastings**, Chairman of the Commission. In this first appearance before the U.S. Congress, I presented an overview of the media freedom situation in the OSCE region, and of the work and interventions of my Office. I addressed, in particular, the issues of the safety of journalists, the situation of imprisoned media professionals, as well as ideas on how to respond to the threats posed by disinformation. Following the hearing, I introduced the screening of our SOFJO documentary "A Dark Place", which was hosted by the Helsinki Commission, with the participation of Committee to Protect Journalists' Advocacy Director, Courtney C. Radsch; Reporters Without Borders' Head of Advocacy Global Division, Thomas Friang; Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)'s Chief of Global Partnerships and Policy, Camille Eiss; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)'s Deputy Director, Martins Zvaners.

During my visit, I met with members of Ranking Digital Rights, Rebecca MacKinnon and Jessica Dheere, as well as members of Freedom House, to discuss media and Internet freedom and safety of journalists in the OSCE region. I also visited Google, where I met with Alex Walden to discuss human rights online, media freedom, and regulation of Internet intermediaries.

On **21 – 23 August**, my Office participated in the National Table-Top Exercise on Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes, in **Dushanbe**, organized by the OSCE’s Transnational Threats Department.

On **2 – 3 September**, my Office participated in the OSCE Asian Conference “How to achieve comprehensive security in the digital era: perspectives of the OSCE and its Asian partners”, in **Tokyo**.

On **6 – 7 September**, my Office spoke on the topic of international law on disinformation in the media, as well as on media policy for national unity and on journalism during armed conflicts, at the Donbas Media Forum (DMF-2019) “Time to Choose Journalists’ Standards”, in **Kharkiv**, Ukraine. The Donetsk Institute of Information organized the event.

On **12 – 13 September**, my Office spoke at a panel on “Policy meets Media” at the EU-Western Balkans Media days, organized by the European Commission in **Podgorica**.

On **16 – 19 September**, I attended the **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM)** in **Warsaw**, where I addressed the opening plenary session. My Office chaired and co-organized Working Sessions I and II on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, free media and information, as well as the specifically selected topics of Working Sessions IV and V on the safety of journalists, including physical and legal.

During HDIM, my Office organized, and I spoke at, four side events. They included an event on “Journalism behind bars in Turkey” co-organized by my Office and Article 19; “The impact of artificial intelligence on freedom of expression”; “A Dark Place film screening – safety of female journalists online” co-organized by my Office with the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights; and “Media freedom and tolerance and non-discrimination” co-organized by my Office with the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department of ODIHR. (For more details, see Conferences).

I also spoke at two other side events, one on “Building resilience to overcome vulnerabilities generated by the misuse of information in democratic societies”, co-sponsored by Finland and Romania and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); and the other on “How to build digital safety for journalism? Best practices and next steps”, hosted by the informal OSCE Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists. In addition, my Office delivered a presentation at a side event on “Journalism is not a crime: ensuring the legal safety of journalists”, organized jointly by the United Kingdom and Canada.

On **21 September**, my Office introduced, and participated in a panel discussion of, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” at the Albanian Human Rights Film Festival in **Tirana**.

On **23 September**, my Office participated at a UNESCO information meeting on the monitoring of the situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Ukraine), in **Paris**.

On **28 September**, I addressed, in writing, the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) in **Dushanbe**, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its establishment, stressing the importance of their work in supporting the media and journalists.

On **2 – 4 October**, I paid an official visit to **Cyprus**, during which I launched the second exchange opportunity for journalists from both Cypriot communities, organized by my Office as part of our Cyprus Media Dialogue project. (For more details, see Projects).

During my visit, I also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, and with the Government Spokesperson, Prodromos Prodromou, to present them with the new phase of my Office’s Cyprus Media Dialogue project. In our discussions, we agreed on the importance of safeguarding and promoting the value of freedom of the media.

On **9 – 10 October**, I paid an official visit to **Georgia**, on the occasion of the 16th South Caucasus Media Conference organized by my Office in Tbilisi. During my visit, I met with the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, and the First Vice Chair of the Parliament, Tamar Chugoshvili, to discuss the latest media freedom developments in the country, and areas in which my Office can provide assistance. I discussed with President Zourabichvili the safety of journalists, combating disinformation, the importance of media literacy, and the role of public service media. During my discussion with Minister Zalkaliani, we discussed combating disinformation, and support to quality information and media pluralism. I met with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, George Tsereteli. (For more details, see Conferences).

On **14 – 16 October**, I paid a visit to **Malta**, where I commemorated the two-year anniversary of the murder of the investigative journalist, **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, attended ceremonies to pay tribute to the journalist, and met with her family.

During my visit, I met with the Foreign Minister of Malta, Carmelo Abela, the Minister of Justice, Owen Bonnici, and the Attorney General, Peter Grech, to discuss the ongoing investigation into the journalist’s murder, the need to ensure no impunity of all those involved in the crime, the importance of having a fully independent and impartial public inquiry, and the lawsuits against her family. I also spoke at a press conference organized by RSF, together with the participation of RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire, RSF UK Bureau Director Rebecca Vincent, and Justice for Journalists Foundation Director Maria Ordzhonikidze.

On **16 – 17 October**, my Office spoke on the topic of “international law on disinformation in the media” at **Umeå** University and **Stockholm** University, and delivered a presentation on freedom of the media, at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

On **19 October**, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” was screened at the International Film Festival in Manhattan, in **New York**.

On **1 November**, my Office participated at the 5th Annual Media Development Forum in **Tirana**, organized by the OSCE Presence in Albania. The Forum discussed, among other things, the ongoing and proposed legislative changes affecting the media, including online media regulations, in the country.

On **1 November**, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” was screened, and a panel held, at the Investigative Film Festival in **Skopje**. The OSCE Mission to Skopje introduced the screening.

On **6 November**, I paid an official visit to **Russia**, on the occasion of the media freedom conference organized by my Office in Moscow, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

During my visit, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, the Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Press and Information Department, Maria Zakharova, and the Chair of the Committee on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Federal Council, Alexei Pushkov. We discussed the safety of journalists and legislations that have an impact on media freedom, such as anti-extremism legislation, the laws on the Internet, the laws on “disrespect” to the state and on the spread of “fake news”, and the Foreign Agent Law. I also raised individual cases of journalists and media workers. (For more details, see Conferences).

On **7 November**, my Office introduced, and participated in a panel discussion of, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” at the Council of Europe’s World Forum for Democracy, in **Strasbourg**.

On **8 November**, I spoke at the Council of Europe’s World Forum for Democracy, which this year focused on the topic “Is democracy in danger in the information age?” in **Strasbourg**.

On **8 November**, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” was screened at an event on “Women in media – safety challenges and way forward”, organized by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, in **Sarajevo**.

On **8 November**, my Office spoke at the meeting of the “Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism” focal points, organized by the Action against Terrorism Unit of the OSCE’s Transnational Threats Department in **Vienna**.

On **11 November**, on the margins of the Seville European Film Festival, my Office organized a screening of, and spoke on a panel about, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” in **Seville**.

On **13 – 15 November**, I participated in a meeting of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Online Content Moderation and Freedom of Expression in **Italy**. During the two-day meeting, legislators, senior officials, corporate representatives from Internet platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as other policy experts from Europe and the United States discussed challenges to freedom of expression on online platforms and will, in 2020, develop a set of recommendations.

On **14 November**, my Office introduced, and participated in a panel discussion of, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” at the Bir Duino Human Rights Film Festival in **Bishkek**.

On **14 November**, my Office co-organized an event on “Fighting cyber harassment of women journalists”, together with the European Foundation of Journalists, la Radio Télévision Belge Francophone and the Belgian Association of Professional Journalists, in **Brussels**, and introduced our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place”.

On **18 November**, my Office organized, and I spoke at, an event on “How do we curtail the spread of hate speech, violent extremism and disinformation online while protecting free speech?” with Susan Ness, Michael Chertoff, Nico Van Eijk and Barbora Bukovska as select members of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Online Content Moderation and Freedom of Expression at the Hofburg, in **Vienna**. The event provided a platform to discuss how to address unlawful content, such as violent extremism or terrorist content, and harmful content, such as disinformation, and which steps are necessary to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when moderating such content online. The event was organized in the framework of the project on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression.

On **19 November**, I participated in, and spoke at, the reinforced Ambassadorial retreat organized by the OSCE Slovak Chairmanship in **Bratislava**.

Conferences and Projects

Central Asia Media Conference

On **17 – 18 July**, my Office organized the 21st Central Asia Media Conference in **Bishkek**, Kyrgyzstan.

The conference brought together over 120 participants from among media professionals, state agencies, civil society and academia to discuss issues related to media freedom and pluralism in times of digital transformation. The conference also addressed the regulation of online media and safety of journalists, as well as provided an overview of media freedom developments in the region.

Following the conference, my Office presented new recommendations, providing guidelines for future policies that will support media pluralism, a legal regulatory framework supportive of media freedom, and self-regulation in the new digital environment.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Chingiz Aidarbekov, the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nuran Niyazaliev, and the Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism, Azamat Zhamankulov. The discussions focused on media freedom developments in the country, including court cases against journalists, the issue of access to information, and physical attacks against journalists.

Self-regulation Education in Mongolia

In Mongolia, my Office facilitated the development of a new curriculum on media self-regulation in the digital age for the BA syllabus in Journalism, and on **22 – 24 August** supported the organization of a workshop for journalism trainers in **Ulaanbaatar**.

Side events at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

On **17 September**, my Office co-organized a side event, together with Article 19, titled “Journalism behind bars in Turkey” at the OSCE 2019 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in **Warsaw**. Journalists and media experts explored the situation of imprisoned journalists and tried to explain why this is the case from a legal point of view, by looking at the current media laws and existing legal safeguards used to protect journalists in the country.

On **18 September**, my Office organized a side event introducing our newly launched project on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on freedom of expression, during the 2019 OSCE HDIM in **Warsaw**, and outlined the activities planned to achieve a clearer understanding among all stakeholders and identifying the key challenges in this area.

On **18 September**, my Office co-organized, together with the Polish Human Rights Commissioner, Adam Bodnar, a screening and panel discussion of our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place”. Experts from international and civil society and women journalists shared their experiences, and discussed the actions needed to implement effectively the latest international commitments to address this type of gender-based violence.

On **19 September**, my Office co-organized a side event, together with ODIHR’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, titled “Media freedom and tolerance and non-discrimination”, during the 2019 OSCE HDIM in **Warsaw**.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In **September**, on the margins of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, my Office launched its project on artificial intelligence (AI) and freedom of expression. The project will promote a clearer understanding of policies and practices in the development and use of artificial intelligence, and the profound impact they have on the future of Internet freedom and the realization of human rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of the media online. As part of the project, policy recommendations will be developed on the most effective ways to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when using AI (and other advanced machine learning technologies), within four thematic areas: (a) security (b) hate speech (c) media pluralism and (d) surveillance.

On **18 November**, my Office organized, and I spoke at, an event on “How do we curtail the spread of hate speech, violent extremism and disinformation online while protecting free speech?” with Susan Ness, Michael Chertoff, Nico Van Eijk and Barbora Bukovska as select members of the Transatlantic High-Level Working Group on Online Content Moderation and Freedom of Expression at the Hofburg, in **Vienna**. The event provided a platform to discuss how to address unlawful content, such as violent extremism or terrorist content, and harmful content, such as disinformation, and which steps are necessary to safeguard freedom of expression and media pluralism when moderating such content online. The event was organized in the framework of the project on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression.

Cyprus Media Dialogue

On **3 October**, I launched the second exchange opportunity for journalists from both Cypriot communities, organized by my Office as part of the “Cyprus Media Dialogue” project, in **Nicosia**, Cyprus. On this occasion, I met with the 15 journalists selected to take part in the exchange, in particular eight Greek-Cypriot and seven Turkish-Cypriot journalists, who will work, for one week, at a host media before the end of 2019.

More specifically, the selected Greek-Cypriot journalists will work in a Turkish-Cypriot media outlet, and the selected Turkish-Cypriot journalists will work in a Greek-Cypriot media outlet. During the exchange, the selected participants will immerse themselves in another newsroom and report on a local story, which they will later share in their home media with their readers, viewers or listeners.

The exchange opportunity aims to encourage and enhance dialogue, co-operation and solidarity between media and journalists from both Cypriot communities; to contribute to media diversity and the free flow of information by providing media content about the life of both communities to the Cypriot public; and to advance accountable, quality journalism in Cyprus.

My Office developed this project in partnership with the Cyprus Journalists’ Union, the Basin-Sen/Press Workers’ Union and the Turkish Cypriot Journalists’ Union.

South Caucasus Media Conference

On **9 – 10 October**, my Office organized the 16th South Caucasus Media Conference in **Tbilisi**, Georgia.

During the two-day conference, journalists and representatives from the media, NGOs, and state representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as international experts, discussed the latest media freedom developments in the region, safety of journalists and the impact of digitalization on news creation and sustainability of the media. The participants also debated the issue of disinformation and “fake news”, as well as the role of journalism in the digital age to promote access to quality and reliable information.

Following the conference, my Office presented new recommendations, providing guidelines to support media pluralism, safety of journalists and legal frameworks in the region.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, and the First Vice Chair of the Parliament, Tamar Chugoshvili. I discussed with President Zourabichvili the safety of journalists, combating disinformation, the importance of media literacy, and the role of public service media. During my discussion with Minister Zalkaliani, we discussed combating disinformation, and support to quality information and media pluralism.

Moscow Conference

On **6 November**, my Office organized a conference on “Freedom of the media and safety of journalists in the Russian Federation and in the OSCE region: Challenges and opportunities in the digital age” in **Moscow**, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. I opened the conference together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov. Speakers included Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, and journalists from different media outlets, including **Ivan Golunov** of **Meduza**, **Igor Rudnikov** of **Noviye Kolyosa**, **Nadezhda Prusenkova** of **Novaya Gazeta**, **Elena Chernenko** of **Kommersant**, **Damian Kudryavtsev** of **Vedomosti**, **Victoria Polikarpova** of **Sputnik**, and **Anna Knishenko** of **RT**, among others.

The conference, the first such one organized by my Office in Russia, gathered over 200 participants representing media professionals, political representatives, academics, civil society, renowned international experts, including from prominent press freedom NGOs, and journalists to address media freedom developments and challenges across the OSCE region.

Participants discussed the current state of media freedom and media pluralism in Russia and the OSCE region; new challenges and responses to safety of journalists; “fake news” and disinformation: how to tackle them, including through Internet regulation and international standards on freedom of expression; and media self-regulation, fact-checking and the role of journalism, ethical standards and media literacy.

On the occasion of the conference, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, the Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Press and Information Department, Maria Zakharova, and the Chair of the Committee on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Federal Council, Alexei Pushkov. We discussed the safety of journalists and legislations that have an impact on media freedom, such as anti-extremism legislation, the laws on the Internet, the laws on “disrespect” to the state and on the spread of “fake news”, and the Foreign Agent Law. I also raised individual cases of journalists and media workers.

Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO)

Within the last months, in addition to the screenings mentioned in this report, our documentary “A Dark Place” and SOFJO project work, including my latest Communiqué on Media Pluralism, Safety of Female Journalists and Safeguarding Marginalized Voices Online (No. 1/2019), have been included in various journalism curricula and training activities for students as well as practicing journalists, at, inter alia, the Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Greenwich, and the KIMEP University of Almaty, and has been screened at Journalism & Women’s symposiums in **Florida**, United States, and meetings of Journalist Associations, including in **Port of Spain**, Trinidad and Tobago.

4. Planned activities for the next reporting period

Visits and participation in events

On **1 December**, our SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place” will be screened at the Pakistan Human Rights Film Festival in **Islamabad**.

On **6 December**, my Office will participate and speak on a panel titled “#Journalisttoo” at a conference about press freedom across the continent, organized by the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) at the UNESCO premises in **Paris**.

In the coming months, my Office will increasingly focus on the broader dissemination of its SOFJO documentary “A Dark Place”.

Projects

Second Central Asia Judicial Dialogue

My Office will organize a second edition of the Judicial Dialogue in Central Asia in **Samarkand**, Uzbekistan, on the protection of freedom of expression while countering illegal content.

Publications

Resource Guide on Safety of Female Journalists Online

In the coming months, my Office will publish a resource and recommendation guide on the safety of female journalists online to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure the safety of female journalists off- as well as online. This guide, to be published in English, will provide guidance on how best to implement key recommendations developed throughout the SOFJO project and beyond. It will include actionable recommendations for all relevant stakeholders, including governments, media outlets, Internet intermediaries and individual journalists, and will include best practices and case scenarios, as well as other implementation measures.

Guidebook on Safety of Journalists

In the coming months, my Office will publish the third edition of the OSCE Guidebook on Safety of Journalists to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure safe working conditions for journalists in the OSCE region. The Guidebook, to be published in English and Russian, will provide a framework of the current situation of safety of journalists and any developments since the publication of the previous edition in 2014, including gender-based violence, and harassment and intimidation of journalists online.

5. Extra-budgetary donors

My thanks go to the Governments of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America for their generous contributions to the work of my Office during this reporting period.

I encourage all participating States to consider supporting my Office's efforts to provide expertise, support and the most up-to-date resources for the promotion and protection of freedom of the media and freedom of expression throughout the OSCE region.