



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council 1563
Vienna, 7 May 2026**

**EU Statement on the occasion of
World Press Freedom Day**

Mr. Chair,

Democracy cannot exist without free press. Independent media is a cornerstone of any democratic society. Access to media, along with freedom of expression are not “*nice-to-haves*”, they are fundamental human rights.

International law is clear: journalists must be protected at all times. They must be able to carry out their work freely, without undue interference, fear of violence, harassment, intimidation, persecution or expulsion. This is especially critical in conflict zones, where journalists shed light on the realities of war, including atrocities and potential war crimes.

Across the world, the killing, injuring, and threatening, as well as the arbitrary detention, forcing into exile and silencing of journalists, has become a shocking reality. Women journalists are disproportionately targeted by gender-based violence, including online harassment and abuse, further silencing critical voices. 2025 was the deadliest year for journalists worldwide ever recorded. The killing of journalists and media actors should be fully investigated and those responsible must be held accountable.

In the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, journalists continue to be at risk daily. We pay tribute to all journalists and other media actors who have lost their lives as a result of Russia’s aggression. Journalists are civilians and must be protected at all times. Russia’s war has also resulted in arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, intimidation and ill-treatment of journalists and other media actors, particularly in temporarily occupied territories, contributing to a climate of fear, censorship and impunity.

The EU condemns the structural system of human rights violations in Russia, which are part of a further intensifying systematic, state-sponsored internal repression. The EU is deeply concerned about the systematic crackdown on civil society, especially independent media and journalists, among others, and about internet shutdowns and online censorship.

In Belarus, the EU strongly condemns the gross, systematic and widespread human rights violations, restrictions to political participation and to independent media, and remains concerned about intimidation campaigns against all segments of Belarusian society in the country and abroad.

Two weeks ago, in response to the report by the RFoM, we reiterated our concern about the situation in Georgia, where we have seen a deterioration of the situation for media and journalists, including arbitrary arrests and increasing repression. As noted, in its Europe Press Freedom Report, published in March, the partner organizations of the Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform assessed that in 2025 the situation in Georgia continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate.

We also highlighted the situation in Türkiye, where the EU remains concerned about targeting of journalists, alongside other groups, including through arbitrary arrests and detentions.

We shared the RFoM's concern regarding the increased levels of violence and intimidation of journalists in Serbia.

As reflected in the discussions two weeks ago, shortcomings persist across OSCE and we are witnessing a historic decline in press freedom. We therefore encourage all participating States, and particularly Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to take further steps to fully respect their OSCE commitments in this regard.

Mr. Chair,

Furthermore, the right to information is under growing threat. Intimidation – online and offline, along with Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) – risk fostering a behaviour of self-censorship amongst journalists. We decry intimidation and repression against journalists taken by authoritarian regimes across the world. Governments must set a solid legal framework to protect their

journalists from abusive court proceedings. Cutting networks of foreign correspondents today only leaves a greater void for dangerous unverified information to circulate. In parallel, outlets posing as media, are spreading fake news and echoing those in power instead of holding them accountable. The consequence is that citizens are increasingly inundated with propaganda and disinformation, disguised as news.

On this World Press Freedom Day, the European Union reaffirms its resolute commitment to defend free, pluralistic, independent and qualitative journalism against this mounting pressure.

At home and around the world, the European Union will continue to defend press freedom.

Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, and San Marino align themselves with this statement.