



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 16 - 27 September 2019

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#### EU statement – Working Session 5 (specifically selected topic): Safety of Journalists

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Mr. Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

At the most recent OSCE Summit in Astana (now Nur-Sultan) in 2010, participating States reiterated that human rights and fundamental freedoms are inalienable, expressing their conviction that “the inherent dignity of the individual is at the core of comprehensive security”. Looking at the conflicts in the OSCE region, this holds true. Freedom of expression, including safety of journalists, is not only a human right under international law and OSCE commitments, but a cornerstone of any democratic, peaceful and prosperous society. It remains a top EU priority, including in the OSCE.

We are therefore concerned about the abuse in some participating States of notions such as national security, anti-terrorism, anti-extremism and incitement to hatred. For example, excessive legislation against terrorism has served to effectively criminalize legitimate journalistic activity in Turkey. We express our hope that the acquittal of Reporters Without Borders’ Turkey representative Erol Önderoğlu and others this July will reflect positively on the many similar cases of journalists in jail on terrorism charges. We note that Mr Önderoğlu still faces other charges related to his work. The EU notes that a prisoner exchange has taken place between Russia and Ukraine. This means that finally Oleg Sentsov, Pavlo Hryb, Edem Bekirov, the 24 captured Ukrainian sailors, and others whose release we have called for so many times, are free and back in their country. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all other Ukrainian citizens who have been captured by Russia on the Crimean peninsula, in violation of international law.



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Whenever governments consider restrictions on freedom of expression in the name of national security, these must be provided by law, serve legitimate interests as defined in international law, and be necessary and proportionate.

A growing concern in this context is disinformation and propaganda, both in terms of the threat it poses to our societies and the counter-measures governments take. The EU is concerned about the continued Russian use of disinformation campaigns to distort media space in the OSCE region as a key tool of its destabilizing actions abroad. We will continue to challenge such attempts by building EU resilience, standing up for freedom of expression, and a free and independent media, and by encouraging media literacy and critical thinking as the antidote. The EU is also worried about governments engaging in censorship as an answer to disinformation, real or alleged. And we are concerned in general by attempts to brand independent media as "fake" or lying, thereby undermining journalism as such.

Disinformation and propaganda require further attention in the OSCE, and we welcome the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in this regard. In Budapest in 1994 and in Istanbul in 1999 participating States recalled the risks of depriving citizens of a free media, of exploiting media in conflict and of fomenting hatred, violence and tension. All participating States have committed themselves to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward the following recommendations to participating States:

- Fully respect their international obligations and commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom, in particular to refrain from unduly and disproportionately restricting freedom of expression, online and offline, under the guise of national security concerns such as fighting extremism or terrorism.
- Devote special attention to the phenomenon of disinformation campaigns.
- Respect the freedom of expression and refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression.



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- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.
- Respect the mandate and autonomy of the Representative and provide him with the necessary resources to fulfil the mandate.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.