



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1234 Vienna, 4 July 2019

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr Harlem Désir**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr Harlem Désir, to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report. The monitoring and assistance by the RFOM are more important than ever in light of the negative trend for freedom of expression and media freedom in many parts of the OSCE area. Attacks and undue restrictions that target journalists and other media actors are not only a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but a threat against our common security. There is a clear positive interconnection between democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to security, and free speech and independent media. As a cornerstone of the OSCE comprehensive concept of security, freedom of expression remains a key EU priority in this Organization.

The EU fully supports the mandate of the RFOM, which is flexible enough to respond to existing threats to freedom of expression and media freedom, including in digital contexts, and to address challenges emerging as a result of the changing media landscape. We reiterate our unequivocal support for the Representative's professional, unbiased and dedicated work in exercising this mandate.

The EU echoes many of the concerns raised by the RFOM in his report. We join his call on Turkey to urgently address and reverse current media freedom violations, with the most recent example being the 6 years and 3 months prison sentence against journalist Haşim Söylemez. With some 150 journalists currently in detention and pre-trial detention and more than 150 media outlets closed since 2016, the environment for critical and investigative

journalism has drastically deteriorated in Turkey. We note positively the recent ruling by the Turkish Constitutional Court that journalist Deniz Yücel's year-long detention violated his right to personal security and liberty, as well as his right to freedom of expression. In Russia, the legislative framework for restricting freedom of expression is constantly expanding and journalists are put under increasing pressure. We share the RFOM's concerns about new laws that strengthen internet control and crack down on so-called "disrespect" to the state and "fake news". While we are relieved that the false drug charges against journalist Ivan Golunov were dropped following massive public protests, his case illustrates the dangers that come with investigative reporting and dissenting views in today's Russia.

The EU remains deeply concerned with the dire situation for freedom of expression in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol, illegally annexed by Russia, as well as in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations in eastern Ukraine. We once again join the RFOM's calls on Russia to release Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov and Ukrainian journalist Roman Suschenko, noting that some 70 Ukrainian political prisoners are illegally detained in Crimea and Russia. We also echo the deep shock expressed by the RFOM following the death of Ukrainian journalist and blogger Vadim Komarov, who died on 20 June after injuries sustained from a violent attack. The investigation must be completed in a vigorous and swift manner, and the safety of all journalists and civil society activists guaranteed.

In much of Central Asia, the situation regarding freedom of expression remains serious. We echo the RFOM's appeal to Tajikistan to provide full and unrestricted access to the online news media, national and international, as well as social platforms and search engines, which he made following the blocking of several internet resources in the country. We also share the Representative's positive remarks about the restored access to multiple online media in Uzbekistan, and express hope that Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) will also be unblocked soon.

The EU welcomes the 6th South East Europe Media Conference, organized by the Office of the RFOM on 18-19 June, and agrees that the media freedom situation in the region is serious. We call on our partners in the region to make use of the RFOM's new set of recommendations, which will help shape policies in support of media development and pluralism, safety of journalists, sustainable and independent public service media, and a legal environment supportive of freedom of expression and media freedom.

We study carefully all recommendations by the RFOM directed to EU Member States. We take seriously the commitment, made by all participating States, to cooperate fully with the

Representative. Freedom of expression and media freedom can never be taken for granted anywhere. In advancing the situation for media within the EU, Member States seek to engage fully with the Office of the RFOM, and deeply appreciate these exchanges.

The EU also fully supports the work of the Office of the RFOM on thematic issues such as safety of journalists and other media actors, freedom of expression in digital contexts, internet governance, artificial intelligence, and disinformation and propaganda. We appreciate in particular the assistance provided to participating States in their implementation of the Milan 2018 decision on safety of journalists, including the recommendations in Communiqué No. 1/2019 on Media Pluralism, Safety of Female Journalists and Safeguarding Marginalized Voices Online. Gender-based attacks on women journalists remain a pressing issue. In this context, we would like to ask the Representative what communiqués, handbooks, non-papers and other publications that he plans for the future.

The EU stands firmly by the RFOM as a unique resource of utmost value to participating States. We again thank the Representative and his able team for their tireless work, and wish you all success in the months to come.

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.