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# OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 21 September – 2 October 2015

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## EU Statement – Working Session 1

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Madame/Mr Chairperson

Freedom of Expression remains a top priority for the European Union. The EU is deeply concerned about the downward trend in many participating States, which is threatening our common security. While recognizing that we all have shortcomings, the EU's recommendations to participating States are to:

- Take urgent steps, including reviewing and revising existing legislation and practices, to improve the implementation of the commitments made on freedom of expression
- Recognize that freedom of expression is a key component of the concept of comprehensive security by putting it at the forefront of OSCE discussions, including in Ministerial Council preparations
- Draw on the expertise of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and engaging constructively on issues of concern while respecting her mandate

Madame/Mr. Chairperson

Today, the EU takes this opportunity to recall a few central OSCE commitments and to raise specific concerns.

In Copenhagen in 1990, all participating States agreed to respect the right of everyone, individually or in association with others, to seek, receive and impart freely



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views and information on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to disseminate and publish such views and information, without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. In this regard, the EU reiterates its deep concern about the recently adopted law on so-called "undesirable" foreign and international organizations in the Russian Federation, as well as, inter alia, the expansion of anti-extremism legislation and of the State Secrecy Act. Such measures curb an open and public debate at a time when public scrutiny of government actions, including actions committed abroad, is more needed than ever.

In Moscow in 1991, participating States agreed that any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be prescribed by law and be in accordance with international standards. The EU is concerned about the growing misuse of security concerns as a pretext to clamp down on the freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Over the last year, the EU has raised its concern regarding such developments in Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan.

The EU is furthermore concerned about the developments of freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Turkey and some parts of the Western Balkans.

The European Union is deeply concerned by increasingly obvious state interference in the freedom of the media and the spreading of disinformation by the Russian Federation in the context of acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine since March 2014 and the illegal annexation of Crimea. The responsibility of participating States to refrain from propaganda for war is clearly stated in the Helsinki Final Act. Furthermore, 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 and tension.

In Moscow in 1991, in Budapest in 1994 and in Istanbul in 1999, participating States recognized that an independent and pluralistic media is essential to free, democratic



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and open societies where governments are held accountable. Participating States also agreed to hold those responsible for attacks and harassments against journalists to account and to improve working conditions for journalists.

Against this background, the actions by the Russian Federation in the illegally annexed Crimea and the parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by the separatists continue to be of urgent concern. So are the internal developments within the Russian Federation. The EU is furthermore troubled by developments in Central Asia. We reiterate, once again, our deep concern about the growing number of imprisoned journalists and advocates of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan, including, among others, Khadija Ismayilova, Rasul Jafarov, Leila and Arif Yunus and Intigam Aliev.

In Sofia in 2004, participating States agreed to take action to ensure that the internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression. In several countries, including Belarus, Tajikistan and the Russian Federation, the EU sees opposite developments.

Finally, the EU takes this opportunity to warmly thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic, and her team for their excellent work. Ms Mijatovic, you continue to act with integrity, professionalism and impartiality. The EU stands by you and your mandate.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\*, and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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