



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1422 Vienna, 11 May 2023

EU Statement in response to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Teresa Ribeiro

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), Ms Teresa Ribeiro, to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report outlining trends related to media freedom – many of which are deeply disturbing. It is our common duty to reverse this backslide.
2. Freedom of expression and media freedom lie at the core of the comprehensive concept of security and constitute essential pillars of democracy and security. By waging its illegal, unprovoked and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has shown what can happen when there is no media freedom, when state-controlled outlets spread propaganda and disinformation, in an attempt to isolate its citizens from independent information.
3. As the RFoM points out, we are faced with an increasing level of weaponisation of information and war propaganda. Freedom of expression must be protected by exposing manipulation, disinformation and propaganda, thereby empowering citizens to protect themselves against the threat of manipulation.
4. Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine – which we condemn in the strongest terms – has had an immense impact on the media environment in Ukraine, as pointed out by the RFoM and in the Moscow Mechanism reports last year. Many journalists and media actors have been killed, attacked, abducted or injured and broadcasting infrastructure destroyed. We deplore the recent killing of journalists Arman Soldin and Bohdan Bitik. By reporting from the front lines and shedding light on gross violations of

international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, journalists and media actors play a crucial role in ensuring accountability.

5. We share the concern about the deteriorating situation for media actors in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the continued persecution of dissenting voices, particularly from the Crimean Tatar community. We reiterate our call for the release of Iryna Danylovykh and other wrongfully convicted citizen journalists in the Crimean peninsula.
6. Russia's external aggression is mirrored by internal repression. Russia has been rapidly moving towards a situation of complete censorship, as stated by the RFoM. The draconian measures taken have suffocated the last remainders of independent journalism, as concluded in the Moscow Mechanism report last year. News and investigative media portals such as Meduza, Proekt, Istories, The Insider and Bellingcat have been outlawed, and many journalists and media actors have been forced to leave Russia to carry out their work from abroad. Several journalists and media actors have been prosecuted and/or sentenced, including Dmitry Ivanov, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Alexander Nevzorov, Andrey Novashov, Maria Ponomarenko, Ivan Safronov and Mikhail Afanasyev. We also condemn the detention of Evan Gershkovich, a journalist and U.S. citizen.
7. In Belarus, the situation is equally worrying. We reiterate our urgent call to Belarus to immediately stop the systematic and extensive persecution of media actors in retaliation for their work, including through criminal charges against media actors such as Aleh Rubchenia, Larysa Shchyryakova, Siarhei Stankevich and many others. We condemn the politically motivated verdicts against journalists and media actors such as Lyudmila Chekina, Valeryia Kastsyuhova, Dzmitry Luksha, Hienadz Mažejka, Andrzej Poczobut, Dzmitry Semchanka, Maryna Zolatava, Stsyapan Putsila, Yan Rudzik, and Raman Pratasevich.
8. We echo the RFoM's call for the immediate release of all journalists and media actors sentenced or detained in Russia and Belarus for carrying out their journalistic work. We also urge Russia to repeal its oppressive legislation, including the laws censoring factual information related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
9. We also note that the RFoM has raised concerns about cases of imprisonment, arbitrary arrest or detention of journalists and media workers in Tajikistan and

Türkiye. In the lead-up to Türkiye's general elections on 14 May, it is important that media plurality and unhindered media coverage is guaranteed.

10. The EU supports the RFoM's ongoing work on Artificial Intelligence and the Policy Manual SAIFE, and we look forward to the launch of the interactive online toolkit. We also support the RFoM's work on media literacy and the safety of female journalists online. The SOFJO Monitoring Guidelines, which will be published soon, will offer valuable guidance to participating States on how to prevent gender-based online violence from escalating into offline attacks.
11. We welcome this year's highly topical Joint declaration on media freedom and democracy which focuses on the mutually reinforcing nature of democracy, the rule of law and media freedom. Media freedom, access to information and the safety of journalists are just as vital online as they are offline. We appreciate the RFoM's continued work of providing guidance to participating States on the Safety of Journalists and look forward to the toolbox that will be presented in November.
12. We carefully study all recommendations made by the RFoM. We are aware that the EU and its Member States are not immune to shortcomings in this area, and we deeply appreciate our exchanges with the RFoM.
13. The RFoM is a unique resource for participating States. We fully support the RFoM mandate. This autonomous institution is more important now than ever before. It is essential that the RFoM is adequately resourced to carry out this crucial mission, and we urge all participating States to ensure that her office receives the necessary resources.
14. We thank the RFoM and her able team for their tireless, courageous and important work. We wish you every success, Representative Ribeiro, and appreciate your unwavering commitment to your mandate.

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

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