



EUROPEAN UNION

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**EU Statement on new Legislation in the Russian Federation
Affecting Freedom of Expression**

The EU is concerned about a worrying trend in terms of media freedom in the Russian Federation. Most recently, a new legislation has been approved, allowing the Ministry of Justice to impose the use of the "foreign agent" label against any foreign media receiving, directly or indirectly, foreign funding. The EU echoes the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, who stated after his visit to Moscow last week that Russia needs to urgently step up efforts to ensure that media freedom and safety of journalists is guaranteed in the country, online as well as offline.

We have raised our concerns over Russia's "foreign agent" legislation many times, which goes against Russia's human rights obligations and OSCE commitments. The extension of its scope to foreign media, in addition to its existing application to Russian NGOs, is a further threat to free and independent media and to access to information, and yet another attempt to shrink the space for independent voices in Russia. Such measures curb a free and open debate at a time when public scrutiny of government actions, including actions committed abroad, is more needed than ever, as the right to receive and express opinion is fundamental to any democratic society, not least in the run-up to the Russian presidential election.

The European Union has a longstanding and clear position that the existing Russian legislation on labelling NGOs as "foreign agents" and the ensuing fines, inspections and stigmatisation for the organisations labelled, further tighten the restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms in Russia, consume the scarce resources of NGOs and inhibit independent civil society in the country. We are concerned that media organisations operating in Russia and designated as "foreign agents" could be stigmatised, fined, and forced to curtail their activities in the same way.

Furthermore, we reiterate the concern expressed by the RFoM in his statement of 23 November about the increased control over information online. Only two weeks ago the State Duma adopted amendments to legislation allowing authorities to block websites of so-called “undesirable organisations” without a court decision.

With regard to these recent legal amendments, the EU urges the Russian authorities to ensure that all legislation, including when implemented, conforms to international human rights standards and obligations, including OSCE commitments. In this regard we recall that in Helsinki 1975, participating States made it their aim to encourage co-operation in the field of information and the exchange of information with other countries, and to improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State exercise their profession in another participating State. We also recall the Istanbul Document from 1999, where we committed ourselves to take all necessary steps to ensure the basic conditions for free and independent media and unimpeded transborder and intra-State flow of information, which we highlighted to be an essential component of any democratic, free and open society.

The EU also remains concerned for the overall safety of journalists in the Russian Federation, with reports on continued incidents of intimidation, threats and violence, including recent attacks on Tatiana Felgenhauer at the Ekho Moskvyy radio station, Yuliya Latynina from Noveya Gazeta and other cases raised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The EU welcomes the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and appreciates that he follows the developments in the Russian Federation closely. We call on Russia to draw on the expertise and advice of the Representative.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.