



**EUROPEAN UNION**  
**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting**  
**"Promotion of Freedom of Expression: Rights, Responsibilities, and OSCE**  
**Commitments"**  
**Vienna, 3-4 July 2014**

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**EU Closing Statement**

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The European Union would like to thank the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and ODIHR, for organising this meeting. We also wish to thank the panellists and those that spoke from the floor for their contributions. As we said at the outset, we welcome the timely opportunity this meeting offered to discuss issues of fundamental importance.

Respect for the right to freedom of expression is a cornerstone of our OSCE commitments and is central to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. Not least in the context of the current crisis in and around Ukraine, it is clear that freedom of expression and a free flow of information are essential for peace and stability. We have spoken on this in the OSCE context on several occasions, including at this meeting, and will continue to do so.

It is with deep concern that we witness an increasing shrinking space for free expression and the exchange of ideas, both online and offline in parts of the OSCE region. We have heard of several examples of this during the meeting. Governments, in clear violation of OSCE commitments, are using a wide range of tools to ensure that critical voices are silenced or marginalised, internet and media outlets censored, disempowered, or shut down. In turn, some of the same Governments engage in information wars and manipulate state controlled media in a manner that often fuels, within their own states, the hate speech they repeatedly claim is on the rise elsewhere.

This is not to say that the EU and its member states are perfect when it comes to freedom of expression and media freedom. Some issues in the EU have been raised by speakers at

this meeting. All participating States face challenges. No state is perfect. But we are not equally imperfect either.

Without freedom of expression and freedom of the media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible. Civil society plays an indispensable role as a watchdog and partner in ensuring the better implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We place great value on the input from non-governmental organisations at this meeting. Their interventions remind us of the gravity of the situation with regards to free expression in our region, and the urgent action that needs to be taken to address this.

We would like to highlight a number of recommendations that have been made during this meeting, and also make some additional ones:

Participating States should redouble their efforts to fully implement their OSCE commitments and other international obligations related to freedom of expression and its corollary media freedom. We greatly appreciate the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and call on all participating States to issue open invitations to the Representative on Freedom of the Media and to engage constructively with her and her office.

We must recognise the enormous opportunities that the internet provides for the enjoyment of freedom of expression. The EU urges governments to ensure that their legislation and practice does not unduly restrict access to the internet, and protects the right of individuals to express themselves freely in any media of their choice. We recommend the Representative on Freedom of the Media to continue her important work in this area, including through the ground-breaking project on Open Journalism, and recommend that participating States draw on the expertise of the Representative on Freedom of the Media also in this regard. We call on all participating States that have not yet done so, to support the draft OSCE Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age, proposed by the US and co-sponsored by all EU Member States.

The role of state-driven propaganda and its impact on society and on security is very clear in our region. We maintain, as does the Representative on Freedom of the Media, that true media pluralism, which allows for a genuine public debate where all voices can be heard, is

of paramount importance to peace and stability. We recommend participating States to heed the advice of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in promoting an environment where freedom of expression and media pluralism can be fully realised.

Any restriction to freedom of expression by a participating State must be fully in line with international commitments, and the application of this restriction should be subject to oversight by an independent judiciary.

As was stated in the opening session, there is a clear connection between the respect, promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression and the protection of human rights defenders. We reiterate our support to the recently published ODIHR Guidelines on protecting human rights defenders, and call on participating States to draw on them when implementing their commitments. We recommend the current and incoming Chairmanships to examine ways to continue the important work that has been initiated on human rights defenders, including at the upcoming Ministerial Council in Basel.

As we have seen throughout this meeting, freedom of expression is a highly topical issue in the OSCE today. We call on the current, as well as future Chairmanships, to ensure that freedom of expression and media freedom receive the attention they deserve within the OSCE, including in forthcoming discussions on strengthening our human dimension commitments.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\*, and SERBIA\*, and the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as UKRAINE, align themselves with this statement.

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