



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N°1079 Vienna, 26 November 2015

EU Statement in Response to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatovic

The European Union warmly welcomes you, Representative Mijatovic, to the Permanent Council, and thanks you for your comprehensive report. We are grateful to you and your team for your excellent work over the last months. The RFoM is a unique and eminently useful institution that can help us all in upholding our joint commitments.

In line with her mandate, the RFoM has raised issues of non-compliance with our commitments wherever they occur in an even handed and unbiased manner.

Within the European Union, we aspire to the highest standards in upholding the right to freedom of expression and creating conditions for free and vibrant media to flourish. The RFoM has addressed a number of concerns to EU Member States on issues related to draft legislation, treatment of journalists, or the need to ensure free access to information in the public interest. We welcome the engagement of the Representative, and remain committed to do better, and to further cooperate with the RFoM to address concerns.

However, the situation of freedom of expression and of freedom of the media has, in a number of participating States, continued to deteriorate. Echoing statements of the RFoM, the European Union has on several occasions expressed concerns related to the worrying cases in Azerbaijan, including about the sentencing of journalist Khadija Ismayilova. We continue to closely follow these developments, and urge Azerbaijan to abide by its OSCE commitments.

We have also raised concerns about the deteriorating respect for the right to freedom of opinion and expression in Tajikistan, and we join the Representative in her calling

to end the repeated internet blockages in the country. We warmly welcome the RFoM's engagement in Central Asia, including the recent regional conference in Dushanbe.

In the Russian Federation, we share the concerns of the RFoM, including about the stigmatisation of NGOs, such as the Glasnost Defence Foundation, and the continued impunity for crimes against journalists. At the same time, it is encouraging that there is some support and recognition in Russia for the important work of the Representative, including the need to safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of the media. We congratulate the RFoM on the "Dialogue of Cultures" prize, awarded to her last week in St Petersburg, and join her in her call on Russia to urgently abide by its commitments.

An open public debate in Russia is more needed than ever, also in light of Russian state-driven propaganda around Russia's actions in Ukraine. We reiterate our deep concern about the crackdown on media freedom and harassment of media actors in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, as well as in those parts of Ukraine under the control of Russia-backed separatists.

We encourage Ukraine to continue to act on the advice of the Representative as the government seeks to improve the media situation in the country. We agree with the Representative that the recent adoption of Law on Print Media Privatisation is a major step forward in advancing media freedom and pluralism in the country. We welcome the continued engagement of the Ukrainian authorities with the RFoM on issues of concern.

We support the engagement of the RFoM on the issue of media in conflict, including tackling propaganda, and expect to see this topic further addressed in the OSCE context.

In Kazakhstan, the closure of the magazine ADAM threatens media freedom and media pluralism. The blocking of internet portals is similarly a cause for concern, as are reports of legal proceedings against journalists and social media users exercising

their right to freedom of expression. We join the RFoM in her call on Kazakhstan to take immediate steps to ensure full compliance with standards and commitments.

The European Union has raised its concern about the developments around the Georgian TV station Rustavi-2. We reiterate the need to work continuously to safeguard media freedom and media pluralism, allowing for a vibrant public discussion and exchange of ideas, and we urge Georgia to do its utmost to ensure that these principles are upheld.

We welcome the cooperation between Turkey and the RFoM, including on training 80 Turkish prosecutors and judges on issues around media freedom and freedom of expression. We hope to see this cooperation bear fruit. At the same time, attacks on journalists and raids against media outlets raise concerns as regards media freedom in the country. We remain convinced that countries benefit from a more open exchange of opinions and ideas, also while combating threats to security.

In the Western Balkans, the RFoM has been active with visits, and raising issues. We share many of the concerns she has expressed and encourage states concerned to work closely with the RFoM to address them. We recall that respect for media freedom is an important element of EU accession criteria.

We all need to increase our efforts to defend and strengthen freedom of expression and of the media freedom in the OSCE region: there is a clear link between open, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our joint security, and free expression and free media. That is why, against the background of the concerns we have, we are pleased that the Serbian Chairmanship has committed itself to take on this crucial issue for the Ministerial Council, and we hope to see our commitments enhanced, by bringing them in line with standards from other international fora. We also welcome the incoming Chairmanship's intention to take up freedom of the media as a priority.

Finally, we again thank you, Representative and your team for your excellent work. We fully support the institution that you lead and the independent and objective way

in which you exercise your mandate as well as the need for you to have the adequate resources to do so.

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, align themselves with this statement.

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