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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 16 - 27 September 2019

EU statement – Working Session 4 (specifically selected topic): Safety of Journalists

Madam Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Freedom of expression and the safety of journalists and other media actors are pressing issues in the OSCE region today, intrinsically linked to overall respect for human rights and to our common security. The EU continues to attach the highest priority to promoting safe and enabling conditions for everyone contributing to journalism to perform their work independently and without undue interference.

The Ministerial Decision reached in Milan 2018 on this topic serves an important impetus within the OSCE, but is also contrasted by our region's many cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, intimidation and violence against reporters and bloggers. We deplore the trend of specific threats, violence and hatred against female journalists. Sexual and gender-based harassment distorts the media landscape and threatens the future of free press. The EU is deeply concerned that all too often violations and crimes against journalists and other media actors in the OSCE region go unpunished, creating a chilling effect throughout society. Impunity leads to more attacks. We fully support the OSCE Representative on Freedom in the Media in making the safety of journalists and other media actors his first priority.

The EU has raised many concerning cases in participating States over the last year. This includes the murder of Ukrainian journalist Vadim Komarov, a string of physical assaults against journalists Sabahattin Önkibar, Hakan Denizli, Ergin Çevik, İdris Özyol, and Yavuz Selim Demirağ in Turkey, and death threats targeting reporters at Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta. More recently, the EU is concerned about the series of attacks by police against journalists and the obstruction to media activities during election-related demonstrations in



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Russia this summer. The cases in Ukraine of disclosure of journalists' personal data, including on web platforms, in a manner which puts at risk their safety are also worrisome for the EU. In Kazakhstan, journalists were assaulted and intimidated during a human rights press conference in July. We also have serious concerns with regard to safety of journalists in parts of Western Balkans, including threats. It is imperative that all incidents, including cases where law enforcement or government officials are involved, are thoroughly investigated. No one is immune to shortcomings. For our part, the EU remains committed to addressing them and working closely with the Representative on Freedom of the Media to this end.

The physical, legal and digital safety of journalists and other media actors is closely linked to the overall standing of the press and freedom of expression in our societies. They are not separate issues. Therefore, we must also be concerned about a growing climate of denigration, de-legitimisation, and constant accusations against media actors. Normalization and indifference of attacks against journalist is a great danger to them and fundamentally to democracy itself.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward the following recommendations to participating States:

- Fully respect their international obligations and commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom, in particular work actively to fully implement Ministerial Council No. 3/18 on Safety of Journalists.
- Take active steps to prevent and respond to violence and harassment against journalists ensuring that all those responsible are brought to justice, paying special attention to gender-based violence online and offline.
- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.
- Respect the mandate and autonomy of the Representative and provide him with the necessary resources to fulfill the mandate.

Thank you.



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

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