



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**The Representative on Freedom of the Media**  
**Teresa Ribeiro**

**23 November 2023**

## **Regular Report to the Permanent Council**

*For the period from 12 May to 23 November 2023*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mister Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to present my bi-annual report to the Permanent Council, covering the period from 12 May to today. It is the sixth report in my tenure as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

As it is the final report of this three-year term in Office, I will take a broader approach this time and pull together my observations and activities, placing them in the wider role of media freedom, the Mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the framework of the OSCE and today's security context.

## **THE OSCE AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

"The world has fallen out of love for democracy. It has become disappointed with the power elite and therefore begun to turn to dictatorship." These were the words of Nobel laureate Dmitry Muratov in his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize in 2021, and unfortunately, I have to agree with him.

Democracy continues to face a downward spiral. This goes hand in hand with restrictions to media freedom and a shrinking space for civil society. We see that independent and critical voices are being silenced with a peak of imprisoned and exiled journalists in our region – a devastating reflection of the state of democracy.

There is growing insecurity in the world, and with this a growing temptation to react to security challenges with short-sighted responses, curbing individual freedoms and human rights. Dmitry Muratov called it an illusion that progress could be achieved through technology and violence, and not through human rights and freedoms. It is an illusion – to use his words – that responses to security challenges can be found in one-sided approaches. We need to rehumanize the world by putting human beings and their rights back into the centre of our actions.

In other words, there is no shortcut in addressing today's security challenges. Media freedom and security are not opposing ends of the spectrum, but concurring to the same goals. There can be no security without media freedom. Only by strengthening our democratic institutions and the rule of law, by preserving and defending media freedom and by investing in a resilient and well-informed citizenry, will we be able to revert the democratic regress and provide sustainable responses to today's uncertainties.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RFoM Mandate last year offered an important opportunity to further carve out the close interlinkages between media freedom, peace and security. As I described in the report published on this occasion, the media landscape has evolved much over the past quarter of a century. Digital transformations have drastically changed our information ecosystem, with many new possibilities but also new challenges. Professional journalism has come under immense pressure, also due to the enormous growth of the online information space. Disinformation and manipulated content have seen a massive surge, with distrust in the news media growing immensely as a result.

There can be no doubt about it: the situation for media freedom is dire. But it is not beyond hope. I am fully convinced, and many experts and interlocutors I encountered over the years in my work as Representative on Freedom of the Media share the same conviction: the fight for media freedom must continue because it is a fight for freedom and for democracy.

With the international free speech mandate holders, we underlined in this year's Joint Declaration the close interrelationship and interdependency of media freedom and democratic values. We referred to media based on functional criteria, such as the dissemination of information and ideas of public interest that support informed societies and democratic participation. The term media freedom refers to editorial independence from political interference or economic capture and to the plurality of news media, including the production, publication and dissemination of journalistic content across all mediums and platforms. Only when this freedom, this independence and plurality is guaranteed, can the media fulfill its essential function in democracy.

This is ultimately the essence of the Mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media: to promote and safeguard media freedom for the benefit of peace and security. These have been the criteria guiding the way in which I served the Mandate entrusted to me over the past three years.

"At a crossroads: Safeguarding media freedom to protect democracy." That was the title of the two regional conferences I organized this year. I decided on this topic, because I firmly believe that we have come to a decisive point in history. We either give in to the autocratic tendencies that throttle our democratic achievements or we choose to acknowledge media freedom as a central pillar of our democracies and find ways to secure its pivotal role in the future

My Mandate is crystal clear on this, and I have used it to further media freedom in support of our common peace and security with all means available to me, along the two-pronged approach it entails: to monitor media freedom developments in the OSCE participating States and intervene on serious violations; and to provide assistance to the participating States to meet their commitments regarding freedom of the media and safety of journalists. This two-pronged approach allows me to intervene on individual cases, and

to provide general guidance, tailor-made assistance and longer-term perspectives on trends and developments.

## **MEDIA FREEDOM ACROSS THE OSCE REGION**

We are living in extremely turbulent times. In addition to the democratic backsliding we are witnessing, armed conflicts and violent outbreaks are unfortunately rising in our region and in our close neighbourhood. We are moving further away from the peace and security we had hoped for in 1975, when the Helsinki Final Act was adopted.

The war against Ukraine by the Russian Federation has impacted the OSCE region and our organization for more than 21 months now. The Ukrainian people have demonstrated an incredible resilience in these difficult times and the journalists reporting from Ukraine have shown an enormous morale to continue their work under the most dangerous and difficult circumstances. Since the start of the war, at least ten media workers were killed while on professional duty, and many more lost their lives in the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. In the reporting period, on several occasions, media workers were again attacked, injured, came under shelling or went missing, instances to which I reacted publicly. I was particularly shocked and saddened by the death of news agency AFP's video co-ordinator Arman Soldin, who was killed as a result of a missile attack in eastern Ukraine. Broadcasting infrastructure was systematically attacked and damaged in different parts of the country, which is a massive loss and damage inflicted on the Ukrainian media sector and a grave violation of international law. Justice and accountability must be served for these terrible crimes. The work of journalists, who report, fact-check and collect evidence, will be essential in this endeavour.

In Crimea, the already troubling situation for media actors and the persecution of dissenting voices also continued. In October, I called for the immediate release of Ukrainian journalist Serhiy Tsyhipa, who was sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment for espionage charges during a closed trial.

My call to refrain from targeting and attacking journalists and media workers, including in times of conflict, remains steadfast. It is prohibited under international law and goes against OSCE human dimension commitments. Last year's Joint Statement on the Invasion of Ukraine and the Importance of Freedom of Expression and Information, in which I called, with the other international free speech mandate holders, to respect the safety of journalists and broadcasting infrastructure still stands today.

In the meanwhile, the silencing of independent media in the Russian Federation continued unabated. Since I issued a statement of early warning to the Permanent Council on 16 March last year to raise attention to the unprecedented repression of free and independent media in the Russian Federation, the list of outlawed news outlets and

investigative portals is continuously growing and so is the list of media and media workers labelled as 'foreign agents' or designated as 'undesirable', including the well-known media outlets Novaya Gazeta Europe. I have repeatedly raised attention to the media and information landscape in Russia, where there is nothing left of what used to be a small but resilient independent media sector.

The number of journalists and media workers who were imprisoned and attacked, as well as those facing charges for so-called spreading of fake news about Russian armed forces, continued to grow. In the reporting period, I raised the cases of Noviy Focus editor Mikhail Afanasyev and Chernovik journalist Abdulmumin Gadzhiev, who were sentenced to 5.5 years and 17 years in prison respectively, while journalists Ruslan Leviev and Michael Nacke were sentenced in absentia to 11 years. I was shocked by a violent attack targeting prominent Russian journalist of Novaya Gazeta Elena Milashina and lawyer Alexander Nemov in Chechnya. Those responsible for this horrendous act, as well as previous crimes against the journalists, remain at large, and must be brought to justice, as I called for.

A similarly bleak picture presents itself when looking at the media situation in Belarus. Many journalists and media actors continue to be harassed or arrested on trumped-up and grave charges, numerous media organizations and journalists have been outlawed by being designated as 'extremists'. Many independent news outlets ceased their operations, primarily due to official banning. The hostile environment forced hundreds of journalists and representatives of civil society to flee the country. More than thirty media workers reportedly continue to remain behind bars, including those imprisoned in the reporting period, such as Pavel Mazheika, Larysa Shchyrakova, Vyacheslau Lazarau, and Alyaksandr Mantsevich. With sentences ranging from 3.5 to 6 years in prison, I have consistently called for their release.

### **Safeguarding journalists' safety**

Although incomparable, the situation for journalists and independent media in other parts of the OSCE region remains of concern, with a surge in violence and attacks against journalists in a number of OSCE participating States. I was saddened by the killing of well-known Kazakh journalist Zhanbota Tolegen in Georgia last June and extend my condolences to her family, friends and colleagues. I was equally saddened to learn about the murder of freelance journalist Josh Kruger in the USA in October and I publicly expressed my expectation that justice will be served.

In many instances, unfortunately, impunity for crimes against journalists remains prevalent. In my video message earlier this month, on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, I underlined the need for States to ensure swift and effective investigation for violence and attacks against media workers. Only when full justice is served can further attacks against journalists be prevented,

sending a clear message that attacks will not be tolerated. There remain unfortunately numerous cases of (partial) impunity in our region and I want to use this opportunity to call on all OSCE participating States to step up their efforts in ensuring justice for killings of journalists, and all other attacks. Impunity must not prevail.

The growing trend of hostile behaviour and hateful rhetoric against independent media and individual journalists, especially when coming from politicians and public officials – from those who should defend democratic values – is concerning. Such acts undermine journalists' credibility and diminish public trust in the media, they also contribute to societal polarization, and expose journalists to greater risks of harassment and violence. Excluding journalists from party congresses or similar public interest events is equally disturbing. I addressed such cases in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Finland, Hungary and Moldova.

In the context of elections, such attacks can have a detrimental effect on the media's ability to fulfil their democratic function. I called on OSCE participating States and relevant stakeholders to protect media freedom during elections in a communiqué published at the beginning of October, also in view of the upcoming elections in the OSCE region. I observed an encouraging example in Switzerland, where during recent elections over 400 candidates signed the so-called 'Manifest for Press Freedom' underlining the need for press freedom in democracy, for free access to information and for safe working conditions for journalists.

Online attacks against journalists continue to pose a major challenge and take on many new forms. The escalating use of digital surveillance technology, including on journalists, raises alarming questions about privacy breaches, the confidentiality of journalistic sources and its overall potential to stifle media freedom and the free flow of information. I issued a communiqué in September warning of the harmful impact of digital surveillance technology on media freedom and the safety of journalists.

In addition to the instances mentioned above, I addressed issues regarding the safety of journalists and the protection of journalistic sources in Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain and the United States of America.

The safety of female journalists online remains a topic of high importance and concern. As monitoring and reporting online attacks against women journalists is key to understanding the prevalence and impact of such horrible actions, I launched our new Guidelines for Monitoring Online Violence against Female Journalists during the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference in early October. These will contribute to recognizing the risk of escalation in a timely manner and give way for early action to prevent online violence from escalating into real life violence – a useful tool for participating States, civil society and media organizations to counter this heinous problem.

The safety of journalists is a multifaceted issue with many, oftentimes interrelated, difficulties. Therefore, I published our Safety of Journalists Toolbox, based on the 2018 Ministerial Council on the Safety of Journalists, which collects national instruments and initiatives from participating States and includes also a compilation of international standards, OSCE commitments and various initiatives for the safety of journalists. I am convinced it will serve as a useful tool to trigger further action in order to close the implementation gap, and it will continue to grow as new measures are being adopted and realized. We look forward to making the toolbox known to relevant stakeholders across the OSCE region, in close collaboration with the OSCE field operations, other relevant partners and, very importantly, the National Focal Points. These National Focal Points, which the participating States have nominated in the course of this project, will continue to form an important network, to take the work on the safety of journalists forward both at the national levels as well as in the framework of the OSCE.

### **An environment conducive to media freedom**

I continue to observe in several OSCE countries the adoption of measures and legislative initiatives that negatively affect the ability of free and independent media to do their work. These entail, *inter alia*, broadcasting bans and website access blocks, and a lack of proper safeguards against potentially disproportionate or arbitrary actions by authorities that want to regulate online information, oftentimes in the context of national security or public order. But as I already underlined, public order and national security must not be seen as standing opposed to freedom of expression and media freedom. I raised issues of worrisome restrictions to freedom of expression and media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Türkiye.

Increasingly, legal regulations, laws and courts are being misused to clamp down on media freedom and independent journalism, to attack those who draw attention to grievances in the public interest. Such legal harassment, including Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs), used by companies, government officials and powerful individuals to suppress uncomfortable criticism has the intention of intimidating, silencing, and draining the financial and psychological resources of their targets. It undermines the economic basis of media workers and media outlets, and has a strong chilling effect on those engaging in public participation. It is equally alarming to observe the continued high number of arrests or detentions in a number of OSCE participating States. Free and independent journalism is not a crime, media workers must not go to prison as a result of their legitimate professional activities: for scrutinizing and holding the powerful to account, reporting on facts and issues that could be perceived as controversial, sensitive or offensive and for investigating wrongdoings. I addressed cases of legal harassment or arrest and detention of journalists in Armenia, Belarus, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Türkiye.

Sound legal frameworks and regulations are an important fundament of an environment conducive to media freedom. Hence, legal reviews are an important instrument of my Institution, providing assistance to the participating States and ensuring that legislative processes are in line with international standards and OSCE commitments.

During the reporting period, I provided such assistance to a number of participating States. My Office contributed to ODIHR's Urgent Comments on the amendments to the criminal law of the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at criminalising defamation. Together with ODIHR, my Office also prepared a joint legal review of the draft law on mass-media of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, presented to a broad range of stakeholders on 31<sup>st</sup> of October, at a special event organized by the Office of the Ombudsperson of Kyrgyzstan. In summer, I commissioned a legal review of the draft law on mass-media of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Importantly, I had the opportunity to discuss the review and the related recommendations with parliamentarians and government officials during my official visit to Kazakhstan last week. I also commissioned a legal review of the UK Online Safety Bill, which was discussed with the UK government and relevant stakeholders during my official visit to the UK in October. Jointly with ODIHR, we received a request from Uzbekistan to review the draft information code.

I strongly encourage all OSCE participating States to make use of this assistance when drafting or amending legislation related to media freedom and to take the recommendations resulting from the reviews into account.

### **Challenges in the digital realm**

Various challenges in the digital realm risk to undermine media freedom and pluralism as a bedrock of democracy. In a broader freedom of expression context, it is essential to ensure that online information spaces provide access to reliable, diverse, and public interest information.

In the framework of our project putting a spotlight on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and freedom of expression ("SAIFE"), we have placed a specific focus on AI-based content moderation and content curation to address challenges linked to illegal content, hate speech, security threats and surveillance-based advertising. The recommendations center around transparency, accountability, democratic oversight, meaningful engagement and human rights due diligence. Over the last months, we put increased emphasis on their implementation, including through capacity-building activities and SAIFE trainings across the region. Only yesterday, we presented our interactive online Resource Hub, which provides access to a variety of research, documents, resources and materials on the topic, compiling all SAIFE resources as well as solution-oriented guidance for States and other important actors.



Looking ahead, it will be important to broaden our conversation to internet governance more widely. We already contextualized the SAIFE recommendations to specific regions and conflict or other crisis situations. We need to look at the role that technology plays, both through malicious use or with unintentional consequences. In the end, healthy online information spaces are the baseline to ensure that the internet serves the public interest and fosters an informed and active citizenry, which in turn enables peace and security.

To this end, it is timely and necessary that we start thinking about what a framework for the information space that will promote the visibility and accessibility of public interest information and content could look like – in other words: a Public Interest Framework. We need to use the potential that digital technologies can offer for the benefit of media freedom and democracy. But for this, we need to be proactive. We are committed to this endeavor and will be developing such a Public Interest Framework, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, with a new project to be launched shortly. Linking press freedom and public interest allows for the protection of media freedom based not only on the individual right to free expression but rather on the collective social benefit derived from independent journalism.

In order for free media and quality journalism to be valued for their key function in democracy, it is imperative to increase the understanding among the broader public of the media's role and value. Since 2022, my Office is implementing an extra-budgetary project aimed at promoting media freedom literacy (MFL) in the OSCE participating States. It specifically focuses at enhancing the knowledge and skills to understand and value the democratic functions of the media and other information providers, online and offline, and the importance of information pluralism. This includes recognizing the vital role of MFL in countering mis- and disinformation in an increasingly saturated digital environment and in building peaceful, knowledge-based societies. MFL builds on the importance of public interest content that feeds and supports public debate. We are currently working on the development of MFL policy guidelines and recommendations to OSCE participating States.

### **Encouraging developments**

Overall, the media freedom developments throughout the region continue to be of great concern. I intervened in total in 135 instances in the course of this year in 30 participating States. On the other hand, I don't want to omit the opportunity to mention some of the positive and encouraging developments I observed over the past couple of months.

I welcome the fact that Lithuania recently adopted its first National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, which makes it part of a growing number of OSCE participating States with a comprehensive instrument to address safety challenges that media professionals face in their work. Recently, the Croatian Ministry of Interior signed a co-

operation agreement with the Croatian Association of Journalists (HDN) and the Croatian Journalists' Union (SNH) with the aim to promote a safe working environment. Consisting of two protocols, the co-operation agreement will improve communication and coordination between media workers and the police in order to enhance police protection and effective investigations into criminal offenses committed against journalists.

Looking at the online information space, the Digital Services Act adopted by the European Commission is a promising example of how to tackle emerging challenges in the digital sphere and provide for a safer and healthier digital space. In the United Kingdom, the Online Safety Bill was adopted with a similar purpose. It is interesting to note that the Online Safety Bill provides for an enhanced role for UK's independent media regulator Ofcom in regulating online platforms to preserve media diversity, promote public interest content, and tackle online harms. I will continue to pay close attention to the implementation of these new regulations at the national level.

### **Country visits**

Many of the aforementioned issues and challenges I have addressed in person with the authorities. When I took office almost three years ago, I was convinced to make the most of the unique platform that this Organization has to offer and of the various instruments at its disposal to further media freedom. My first and foremost priority was to meet all of you, the Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the 57 participating States, and to start building conducive conditions for a constructive dialogue, which would pave the way for closing the gaps on the implementation of OSCE commitments in the area of media freedom and the safety of journalists. This is also the reason why I put so much emphasis on conducting country visits, which allowed me to familiarize with the media situation in individual participating States and to meet with local stakeholders.

#### ***Slovakia***

On 8 June, I visited Slovakia with the aim to discuss persistent challenges to media freedom and assess the progress made in ensuring the safety of journalists in the country. I held meetings with several Ministers and the Chairperson of the Council for Media Services. I addressed the concerning backdrop of the recent acquittal in the double murder case of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. I commended Slovakia for working towards a new protection mechanism designed to enhance the safety and security of journalists operating within the country.

#### ***Kyrgyzstan***

Prior to the Central Asia Media Conference in the beginning of July, I conducted an official visit to Kyrgyzstan, where I met with Ministers and other government officials, with the

Deputy Ombudsperson and the Chair of the State Agency for Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic. We discussed several key topics, including the draft laws “On Mass Media” and “On Foreign Representatives”, as well as the implementation of the law “On Protection from Inaccurate (False) Information”. We also discussed the safety of journalists and the crucial role of an independent public service media.

### ***Turkmenistan***

After the conclusion of the Central Asia Media Conference in July, in Turkmenistan I held meetings with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chairperson of the Mejlis Dünýägözel, with the Chairman of the State Committee for Television, Radio Broadcasting and Cinematography and with the Ombudsperson. We discussed numerous challenges to media freedom in the country, specifically highlighting restrictions on the free flow of information, both online and offline, along with limited access to information in the country.

### ***United Kingdom***

From 17 to 18 October, I conducted an official visit to the United Kingdom, during which I engaged in a series of productive meetings with various stakeholders, including Ministers and other government officials, Members of Parliament, with media regulator Ofcom and members of civil society. We addressed the safety of journalists, including the implementation of the UK’s national action plan and the ongoing efforts within the UK to combat legal harassment and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) through a set of anti-SLAPP measures. With Ofcom, I highlighted the importance of enforcing the Online Safety Bill in line with media freedom standards.

### ***Kazakhstan***

I conducted an official visit to Kazakhstan from 13 to 14 November, where I engaged in a series of meetings, including with the Minister of Culture and Information, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Assistant to the President on internal policies and communication. I also met with members of Parliament, including the Chair of the Committee for Social and Cultural Development of the Mazhilis, the Chair of the Working Group on Drafting the Law on Mass Media. The visit provided the opportunity to discuss the legal review my Office commissioned of the draft Law on Mass Media, as requested by the Kazakh authorities. I stressed, *inter alia*, the value of including all relevant stakeholders, such as civil society actors, in legislative processes.

### ***Uzbekistan***

Following the visit to Kazakhstan I visited Uzbekistan from 15 to 17 November, which included a meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister, the Assistant to the President, the Chair of the Committee of the Legislative Chamber for Innovations, Information Policy

and Information Technologies, and the Director of the Agency for Information and Mass Communications. The discussions evolved around the safety of female journalists and Uzbekistan's draft Information Code. We discussed the possibility of future assistance in assessing media related legislation in order to align it with OSCE commitments and international standards. A highlight of the visit was the Roundtable on Gender Sensitive Journalism, co-organized with the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan and the Public Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media.

I take this opportunity to thank the respective delegations for the excellent co-operation in organizing these country visits.

### **Conferences and high-level events**

In the reporting period, I participated in a number of conferences and high-level events where I defended media freedom and underlined the need to be pro-active in our approach to create an enabling environment for free media, also in the digital context.

The aforementioned South East Europe Media Conference, held in Skopje on 16-17 May, and the Central Asia Media Conference, held in Bishkek on 6-7 July, provided an important platform for regional and local media actors, state authorities, civil society, academia and OSCE field operations to come together, where a wide range of challenges to media freedom was addressed, while developing ideas for the way forward. Over the years, these conferences have become central pillars of my Institution's work in the regions, as they have allowed to build a professional network with and between regional key actors and provide a conducive atmosphere for open discussions. This year's "marketplace" format with smaller parallel sessions, roundtables and workshops allowed for a lively and interactive exchange, which was much appreciated by the participants. I want to thank the OSCE field operations in both regions for their valuable contributions in making these events such a success.

At the 2023 IPI World Congress of the International Press Institute, which took place on 25-26 May in Vienna, my Office co-organized the Town Hall meeting on 'New frontiers: Press freedom and media innovation in the age of AI', and a workshop on addressing the impact of AI on media pluralism and public interest information. An outcome report prepared by former UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression David Kaye provides recommendations to the OSCE participating States and other stakeholders that are available in the SAIFE Resource Hub.

I was invited to deliver a keynote speech at the EPRA Meeting taking place in Oslo from 31 May to 2 June addressing media regulators from across the OSCE region, on how to build an online information ecosystem that supports people's access to public interest content. It was an important occasion to underline the importance of adjusting to current

realities, and recognising the imperative role of media regulators for improving the online information space.

It was a pleasure to address OSCE's Human Dimension Committee on 18 July on the topic of arrest and detention of journalists, including citizen journalists. I underlined that the global spike in the number of imprisoned journalists and media workers and the overall regress in media freedom and the safety of journalists goes hand in hand with the global decline in democracy, the repression of civil society and censorship of independent media. I also highlighted the important tools the OSCE has to address such challenges, including the Human Dimension mechanisms and the OSCE institutions.

During this this year's Warsaw Human Dimension Conference offered an important opportunity to discuss ways to promote independent and ethical journalism as an important antidote to growing misinformation, disinformation and propaganda. In addition, we organised three side events. The first was on media freedom during elections, organized in partnership with ODIHR, on the occasion of publishing my latest communiqué on this topic. The second side event focused on the role of public service media and regulators in promoting public interest content and safeguarding democracies. Experts shared insights on adapting public service media to evolving media environments, highlighting good practices such as engaging young voices and fostering resilience in democracies. A notable highlight was the progress made by the Ukrainian Public Broadcasting Company (UA:PBC) in promoting independent media in the midst of wartime challenges. A third side event was organized to launch the new OSCE Guidelines for Monitoring Violence Against Female Journalists Online.

It was also a great pleasure to be invited to the Council of Europe conference "The Pen is Mightier than the Sword?" on the Safety of Journalists organized in partnership with the Latvian Government on 4-6 October in Riga and to underline the complementarity of our two organizations in addressing challenges journalists face in their work.

At this year's Internet Governance Forum taking place in Kyoto, I spoke on an online panel organised by my Office titled "The Digital Town Square Problem: Safeguarding Public Interest Information Online". I stressed that we need to safeguard quality information and public interest in the evolving media ecosystem, which is essential for the realization of the OSCE approach to peace and security.

I had the pleasure of participating in a high-level event on elections on 23-24 October in Brussels organized by the European Commission ahead of the European Parliament elections next year. It was an excellent opportunity to underline the role of free and independent media during this important democratic process.

I was pleased to participate in high-level meetings and panels in Madrid and Vilnius earlier this month addressing challenges to democracy and underlining the need for pluralistic,

professional and independent journalism. The Future for Democracy Forum held in Vilnius from 9–10 November was truly inspirational, bringing together democracy champions from all around the world to jointly think about strategies on the way forward in strengthening democracy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The RFoM is a unique institution with a unique convening power, allowing it to work at the forefront of persisting and emerging media freedom challenges. From the beginning of my tenure, I have in a direct, open and productive way attempted to place individual cases within the larger trends that characterize challenges to freedom of the media in the OSCE region. This means that I have not always publicly voiced my concerns about all possible individual cases – sometimes diplomacy behind closed doors is more effective. This also means that I have constantly balanced my interventions and assistance against the greater purpose of the Mandate. It was established 26 years ago, to watch over media freedom across our region, not only as a value in itself, but as an essential pillar of OSCE's comprehensive security.

Therefore, all my efforts form part of a larger commitment to peace and security.

I think it is fair to say that this Mandate was never more seriously challenged than it is now, in an information space that has undergone enormous changes. Challenged, but more needed than ever, I believe – focused on the undeniable values behind it, undistracted by the voices that want this institution to go astray in an attempt to obliterate all that it stands for.

Before I conclude this report, I want to express my sincere thanks to the OSCE field operations, the OSCE Secretariat, ODIHR and HCNM, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as well as all external partners, the dedicated media community, academia, civil society and every individual journalist I had the pleasure of meeting over the past years and months. My special thanks go to the North-Macedonian Chairpersonship for the excellent collaboration this year and the unwavering support for the RFoM Mandate. It was a pleasure to participate in the CiO's Gender Conference in Tetovo in September to underline the need to increase our collective efforts to promote online safety for women journalists.

Also, I want to express my sincere gratitude to you, the OSCE participating States.

A special thanks goes to those that have provided us with extrabudgetary contributions and the secondment of qualified staff. I thank in particular the delegations of Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America for their support.

Lastly, I want to use this opportunity to thank my fantastic team for embarking on this journey with me, displaying true dedication and expertise for the cause of media freedom.

## ANNEX

19 <sup>th</sup> week 08/05 – 14/05	Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 1	
20 <sup>th</sup> week 15/05 – 21/05	<b>Event of the week:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- South East Europe Media Conference</li> </ul> <hr/> Outgoing letters: 2 Press releases: 1 Social media: 6	Legal harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues
21 <sup>th</sup> week 22/05 – 28/05	Outgoing letters: 10 Incoming letters: 2 Social media: 3	Disinformation/Propaganda Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal Harassment/SLAPPS Safety of journalists
22 <sup>th</sup> week 29/05 – 04/06	<b>Event of the week:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) meeting</li> </ul> <hr/> Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 1	Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists
23 <sup>th</sup> week 05/06 – 11/06	<b>Country visit:</b> Slovakia <b>Event of the week:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Countering Online Violence against Women, “OSCE Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists”</li> </ul> <hr/> Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Press releases: 1 Social media: 2	Legal harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists
24 <sup>th</sup> week 12/06 – 18/06	<b>Events of the week:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Screening and Discussion on Backlash: Misogyny in the Digital Age</li> <li>- 6<sup>th</sup> Roundtable on Safety of Journalists</li> </ul> <hr/> Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 3 Social media: 3	Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists
25 <sup>th</sup> week 19/06 – 25/06	Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 6 Incoming letters: 1 Social media: 4	Legal harassment/SLAPPS Rule of Law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists
26 <sup>th</sup> week 26/06 – 02/07	<b>Event of the week:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2023 Summer School on Journalism Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom of the European University Institute</li> </ul> <hr/>	Arrest/detention Disinformation/propaganda



	Bilateral meetings: 3 Outgoing letters: 5 Incoming letters: 3 Social media: 6	Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists
27 <sup>th</sup> week 03/07 – 09/07	<b>Country visit:</b> Kyrgyzstan <b>Event of the week:</b> - Central Asia Media Conference	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists
	Bilateral meetings: 7 Press releases: 1 Social media: 3	
28 <sup>th</sup> week 10/07 – 16/07	<b>Country visit:</b> Turkmenistan	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists
	Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 3 Press releases: 2 Social media: 3	
29 <sup>th</sup> week 17/07 – 23/07	<b>Event of the week:</b> - Human Dimension Committee Meeting	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal harassment/SLAPPS Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists
	Bilateral meetings: 3 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 2 Social media: 4	
30 <sup>th</sup> week 24/07 – 30/07	Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 3 Social media: 5	Arrest/detention Safety of journalists
31 <sup>th</sup> week 31/07 – 06/08	Bilateral meetings: 2 Outgoing letters: 6 Incoming letters: 2	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists
32 <sup>th</sup> week 07/08 – 13/08	Outgoing letters: 6 Social media: 1	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues
33 <sup>th</sup> week 14/08 – 20/08	Outgoing letters: 3 Incoming letters: 1 Press releases: 1 Social media: 2	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists
34 <sup>th</sup> week 21/08 – 27/08	Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 1 Social media: 2	Disinformation/propaganda Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists
35 <sup>th</sup> week 28/08 – 03/09	Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 3 Social media: 6	Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues

		Safety of journalists
36 <sup>th</sup> week 04/09 – 10/09	<p><b>Event of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chairpersonship’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” Conference</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Incoming letters: 1 Press releases: 1 Social media: 4</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists</p>
37 <sup>th</sup> week 11/09 – 17/09	<p>Bilateral meetings: 2 Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 2 Press releases: 1 Social media: 5</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Legal harassment/SLAPPS Safety of journalists</p>
38 <sup>th</sup> week 18/09 – 24/09	<p><b>Event of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media Development Forum, OSCE Presence in Albania</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Bilateral meetings: 4 Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 2 Social media: 1</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists</p>
39 <sup>th</sup> week 25/09 – 01/10	<p>Bilateral meetings: 2 Outgoing letters: 1 Incoming letters: 1 Social media: 2</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues</p>
40 <sup>th</sup> week 02/10 – 08/10	<p><b>Events of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warsaw Human Dimension Conference</li> <li>- Side event: Media Freedom during elections</li> <li>- Side event: The Role of Public Service Media and Independent Media Regulators in Safeguarding the Public Interest and Democracy</li> <li>- Side event: Countering online violence: Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Outgoing letters: 2 Incoming letters: 3 Press releases: 1 Social media: 10</p>	<p>Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists</p>
41 <sup>th</sup> week 09/10 – 15/10	<p><b>Event of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet Governance Forum 2023, “The Digital Town Square Problem: Public Interest Info Online”</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Bilateral meetings: 5 Outgoing letters: 3 Social media: 3</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of journalists</p>

<p>42<sup>th</sup> week 16/10 – 22/10</p>	<p><b>Country visit:</b> United Kingdom <b>Event of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual Conference of the International Institute of Communications IICOM - Trust &amp; governance: protecting media freedom, media plurality and access to information in the digital era</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Bilateral meetings: 6 Outgoing letters: 5 Social media: 1</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists</p>
<p>43<sup>th</sup> week 23/10 – 29/10</p>	<p><b>Events of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- European Commission "High-Level Event on Elections" - Informed Choices for Democratic Decisions: supporting a fair democratic debate</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Bilateral meetings: 1 Outgoing letters: 2 Press releases: 1 Social media: 1</p>	<p>Legal harassment/SLAPPS Safety of journalists</p>
<p>44<sup>th</sup> week 30/10 – 05/11</p>	<p>Bilateral meetings: 3 Outgoing letters: 4 Social media: 2</p>	<p>Arrest/detention Hindrances to media pluralism and free flow of information Safety of journalists Rule of law/legislative issues</p>
<p>45<sup>th</sup> week 06/11 – 12/11</p>	<p><b>Events of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Panel on Challenges to Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Madrid</li> <li>- Future on Democracy Forum, Vilnius</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Incoming letters: 1 Social media: 2</p>	
<p>46<sup>th</sup> week</p>	<p><b>Country visits:</b> Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan <b>Events of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Roundtable on Gender-Sensitive Journalism</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Outgoing letters: 2 Press Releases: 1 Social Media: 2</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists</p>
<p>47<sup>th</sup> week</p>	<p><b>Events of the week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch event of the Safety of Journalists Toolbox</li> <li>- Conference “Shaping the Future: Media Freedom and Security in a Changing World”</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Incoming letters: 1 Press Releases: 1 Social Media: 7</p>	<p>Rule of law/legislative issues Safety of Journalists</p>