



## EUROPEAN UNION

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#### EU Statement in Response to the Delegation of the Russian Federation

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According to the press release issued by the European Parliament yesterday, Members of the European Parliament - quote - warn that propaganda pressure on the EU from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups is growing. It seeks to distort the truth, incite fear, provoke doubt and divide the EU – end of quote.

We will not comment in detail on all the absurd assertions in the Russian statement.

However, concerning the situation of media freedom in the EU, we would like to briefly respond by stating that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of the European Union's values. The EU's commitment to respect freedom and pluralism of the media, as well as the right to information and freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, similar to the provision of Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protocol of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The 2016 World Press Freedom Index ranks the average ranking of the EU as 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 180 countries, with five EU countries in the world's top 10 for press freedom.

By contrast, Russia ranks 148<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index. In 2001, Russia was ranked 60. It is clear that media in Europe are able to operate independently and hold their governments to account in a way which is not the case in Russia.

In its Conclusions on 19-20 March 2015, the European Council of Heads of State and Government stressed the need to “challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns.” As High Representative/Vice President Mogherini mentioned yesterday in the European Parliament: “Exposing disinformation is an important task. It is clear that the challenge coming from disinformation is not receding. We see it is official,

organised and rewarded. It comes in many forms, from conspiracy theories to threats, fakes and ridicule. We see that it seeks to distract and confuse; to denigrate our reputation and undermine our values; to create discord, instability and fear; and to undermine consensus and cohesion. For that reason, we reserve the right to identify it; raise awareness of it; and respond to it.”

Since late 2015, the European External Action Service provides a Disinformation Review. These reviews provide examples of persistent disinformation provided by Russian state media. The EU exposing disinformation and illustrating why the information is fabricated does not equate to producing disinformation.

There are standards by which journalism is measured. Those standards do not include receiving instructions from the government on what to write and what not to write; forging pictures and faking testimony; or being awarded military medals for reporting in the way the government wants. Of course, there can be different viewpoints and narratives on the same story. But facts are facts. When those narratives deliberately distort and disinform, they lose their legitimacy. Disinformation is not a different point of view, disinformation is only disinformation, and when we see it, we need to set the record straight.