



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement on World Press Freedom Day

Yesterday marked the World Press Freedom Day. The European Union welcomes this year's theme *Critical minds for Critical Times*. A statement by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU has been distributed. This is an occasion for all of us to reflect on the indispensable role of free, diverse and independent media in any democratic society. Without freedom of expression and free media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible. In the OSCE specifically, World Press Freedom Day serves as a reminder to fully implement the commitments we have taken in this field, to make sure that critical voices can be heard and that journalists can perform their work independently and without undue interference. Free expression and free media are cornerstones of our common security.

The EU therefore continues to condemn the increasing level of intimidation, pressure and violence that journalists, human rights defenders, media actors and other individuals face, including in the OSCE region, when exercising the right to freedom of expression and opinion, online and offline.

While the character of the problems differs between participating States, we are all affected and we can all do better. As for the EU, the European Parliament has addressed media freedom and pluralism in a number of reports, as well as in numerous parliamentary questions, covering issues in several EU Member States. In the OSCE, EU Member States have sought to engage fully with the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and we have deeply appreciated these exchanges.

Looking outside the EU, the two recent deaths of Russian journalists known for their critical work raise questions. On 16 March journalist Yevgeny Khamaganov died in a hospital emergency room in Ulan-Ude. The cause of death was unclear, and we

would appreciate more information on the response by authorities. On 19 April Nikolay Andrushchenko, founder and investigative correspondent for weekly newspaper Novyi Petersburg, died as a result of injuries following an assault. We are also deeply concerned by very recent allegations of intimidation towards journalists from Novaya Gazeta and urge the Russian authorities to ensure that journalists in Russia are allowed to carry out their duties without fear of violence. The EU calls on all participating States to take active steps to prevent and respond to violence against journalists and ensure that both state and non-state perpetrators and instigators of such violence are brought to justice.

The EU further shares the concerns expressed by the RFoM with regard to the large numbers of closed media outlets and imprisoned journalists in Turkey, including Die Welt correspondent Deniz Yücel. We are closely following the indictment against 19 journalists and executives of the Cumhuriyet newspaper, noting with concern the harsh prison sentences demanded by the prosecutor.

Many other cases could be brought up in this context: We are concerned about a series of defamation suits against three prominent local media outlets as well as several individual journalists and commentators in Kyrgyzstan, the reported detention of over 90 journalists during the month of March in Belarus for covering or attempting to cover public protests, and the current lawsuit on the blocking of a number of opposition websites in Azerbaijan.

According to Reporters Without Borders, which just released the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, media freedom is under more threat than ever. Against the backdrop of the many challenges facing freedom of expression and free media in the OSCE region, the EU deeply regrets that the position of Representative on Freedom of the Media is vacant. A solution is urgently needed, and we call on all participating States to act accordingly. The EU continues to fully support the efforts by the Austrian Chairmanship to reach consensus on a new Representative and we welcome media freedom as a continued Chairmanship priority. This issue has remained a priority for several Chairmanships in a row, signalling its continuing importance for the OSCE. We also fully support the ongoing activities by the Office of the RFoM.

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, as well as ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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