



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 974
Vienna, 28 November 2013**

**EU statement in response to the Report by the
Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja
Mijatović, and on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of
the RFoM**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her address and her comprehensive report. We congratulate Ms Mijatović and her entire team, as well as the previous Representatives, Mr Freimut Duve and Mr Miklós Haraszti, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the RFoM. For 15 years, the office of the Representative has played an immensely important role in assisting OSCE participating states to implement their commitments in the area of freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of the media. The challenges we all are facing and the worrying tendencies as regards media freedom that we can see in the OSCE region make the work of the Representative as relevant and needed as ever.

The EU has been, and remains, a staunch supporter of the RFoM. We commend the tireless work of the Representative and her staff and we take this opportunity to reiterate our full support for the mandate of the Representative, which has proven flexible enough to respond to existing, as well as emerging, threats and challenges to freedom of expression and media freedom throughout the OSCE region. We encourage the RFoM to continue making use of all the tools at her disposal in carrying out her mandate. We reiterate that the RFoM should have the necessary means to fulfil her mandate, particularly in light of rising demands. We call on all participating States to respect the mandate and autonomy of the RFoM, and to fully cooperate with the Representative and her Office in accordance with their existing commitments.

We welcome her Regular Report to the Permanent Council for the period from 13 June to 27 November 2013 - Issues raised with participating States presented to us today. Ms Mijatović highlights concerns as and where she sees them regardless of geographical location. This and previous reports demonstrate that many participating States including in the EU face challenges. None of us have a perfect record and we encourage all participating States to maintain a dialogue with the RFoM and to reflect carefully upon her recommendations.

As we have stated in the past, strengthening freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists, is a longstanding top priority for the EU. We also note that media freedom is part of the Copenhagen criteria. Free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to any open and democratic society. In turn, the full enjoyment of freedom of expression by each and every individual, whether it be online or offline, is indispensable to media freedom.

As OSCE participating States, we have committed ourselves to acknowledge the role of the internet in strengthening freedom of expression, to ensure that the internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression, and to foster access to the internet. In too many countries in our region, these commitments are not upheld. Excessive restrictions to the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the internet, as well as offline, are clearly violations of our commitments. We are deeply concerned by censorship, blocking and filtering of the internet in some participating States.

We remain deeply concerned by the extensive limitations on freedom of expression and media freedom in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus. Nevertheless, we note the cooperation that has been initiated with the RFoM, and hope that it will bring tangible results.

For free media to exist, it is crucial that journalists can work without fear of violence or harassment. Nevertheless, many continue to be intimidated, attacked, threatened, harassed, and even murdered for their work. In the reporting period, there have been several other cases of violent attacks against journalists and news outlets in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Turkey, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. We

recall our condemnation of the murder of journalist Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev of the Russian Federation on July 9. The EU calls on the relevant authorities to thoroughly investigate these cases and bring all those responsible to justice.

Detention, arrest or imprisonment of individuals as a way to silence critical or controversial voices in society remains a worrying practice in some OSCE participating States, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan. We also share the Representative's concern about the large number of imprisoned journalists in Turkey. We also join the RFoM in calling for the release of Dilmurod Saiid, Hairullo Khamidov and Solijon Abdurakhmanov in Uzbekistan. We will keep following closely the case of journalist Tomislav Kezarovski of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation we note with concern that sanctions against media outlets for minor offences have in some cases been disproportional.

Positive legal developments are taking place in some participating States. We welcome that for example Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine are planning or undertaking legal reforms in order to improve their implementation of media freedom commitments, often drawing on the expertise of the RFoM and we encourage all participating States to make full use of the expertise offered by the Representative and her team.

Against the background of these concerns, we hope in Kyiv to see a robust decision on protection of journalists that furthers our commitments, and takes into account standards adopted in other international and regional fora, including as regards all forms of media. Last year's landmark resolution of the UNHRC on the safety of journalists, which recognises the importance of all forms of media serves as an excellent example of how globally agreed standards could be reaffirmed within the framework of OSCE commitments. We warmly welcome the adoption by consensus on 26 November, in the third committee of the UNGA of the resolution on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

To conclude, we would like to assure Ms. Mijatović of our continued support and our commitment to cooperate fully with her and her able team. Once again, we

congratulate the Representative and her staff on the 15th anniversary and thank them for their excellent work.

The Candidate Country MONTENEGRO* and the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA align themselves with this statement.

* Montenegro continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.