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## **The debate on the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. PC, 28 November. Iceland**

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me first to join other speakers and welcome Ms Dunja Mijatovic to the Permanent Council and congratulate her on the annual report, as well as on the 15th anniversary of the work of her Office. Thanks also for the informative and inspiring video shown to us a moment ago.

As many speakers have eloquently formulated before me, ensuring freedom of the media is indeed a crucial part of our common endeavour. Free media is necessary in a democratic society, and freedom of expression is the basis for the enjoyment of other fundamental human rights.

This is the core of the commitments that we have undertaken within the OSCE area, and mandated the Representative of the Freedom of the Media to monitor.

And this, Ms. Mijatovic and her able staff has done diligently, professionally and courageously.

Iceland is one of the countries mentioned in the annual report because of a recent draft amendment to our criminal code that is intended to expand legal protection to certain minorities but at the same time could limit freedom of expression.

Mr. Chairman,

When this came up, my mission immediately established contacts between the relevant experts in Reykjavik and the Office of the Freedom of the media, and I am pleased to share with you that we have benefitted greatly from this exchange of views.

The draft amendment is now being discussed in the Parliament of Iceland, where the concerns of the RFOM are duly noted, as well as in the society as large as the views from Vienna were positively reported in the Icelandic media.

This has in fact triggered a healthy debate on where the freedom of expression ends and the protection of minorities starts – how we can guarantee freedom of expression while also combating hate speech and safeguarding the human rights of minorities –and what the role of the criminal code should be to that end.

At the same time, I will not shy away from the fact (to quote one of our colleagues in the PC) that no country likes to be criticized or be the subject of concern.

However, no country is excluded from OSCE's monitoring mechanisms, and the independence of our institutions is one of the elements that make up OSCE's uniqueness. Iceland is and remains a strong supporter of this independence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.