



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

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AMBASSADOR JAN BRAATHU DELIVERED TO THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me today to present a summary of my second report to the Permanent Council as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. The final version of the full report will be distributed tomorrow.

This year, under Finland's Chairpersonship, we also mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, a milestone that reminds us that media freedom is not only a fundamental democratic value but also an essential pillar of security.

Since my previous address, I have worked closely with participating States, journalists, and civil society across the OSCE region. It has been a busy period, with 126 public interventions and correspondence with 46 participating states, in addition to conferences, workshops and country visits. More information on activities are listed in the Annex to my report.

These engagements have reconfirmed a fundamental principle at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security: media freedom is not a perk of democracy or a luxury, it is a prerequisite for it. Nor is media freedom a threat to stability, it is a cornerstone of stability.

This second report, while acknowledging meaningful cooperation and some progress, also carries a note of caution: we are witnessing a significant shift in the media environment, and the choices we make today will determine the resilience of our media and, by extension, our democratic security architecture, for years to come. Seemingly marginal developments carry with them the danger of "normalization" and if not curtailed, may develop and become a "new normal". My Office remains focused on constructive engagement and practical support to safeguard media freedom in principle and in practice.

## **Paradigm Shift**

Dear colleagues,

Across a growing number of OSCE participating States, we are witnessing pressures on media freedom. Securitisation of information and economic constraints compound this deterioration: journalism, as a profession, is struggling for survival. Advertising revenue has migrated to digital intermediaries, local outlets are disappearing, and sustainable business models remain elusive.

We are witnessing a paradigm shift in the information space, one that threatens media freedom, democratic discourse, and our security architecture. The environment in which information is sought, debated, and defended is rapidly being reshaped by political and corporate forces, recalibrating the flow of information often to serve narrow interests rather than the public good. Online spaces, which contribute to democratizing communication, have also become fertile ground for manipulation, polarization, and disinformation. As the American commentator Peggy Noonan recently pointed out, “We are a nation divided by algorithms.” She was speaking about the United States of America, but indeed, we are a world community divided by polarising algorithms. Noonan added that “We are all getting different versions of reality every time we look at a screen, and it is hurting us.” And indeed, it is.

Compounding these challenges is the increasingly common practice by some political figures to disparage and smear journalists, an approach that corrodes public confidence in the press and encourages hostility toward those tasked with informing the public. I look forward to working with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and others on how to follow up OSCE commitments for authorities to desist from verbal abuse of journalists.

Today, this shift is further accelerated by the transformative power of artificial intelligence and the dominance of global social media platforms. Automated content generation and recommendation algorithms increasingly determine what people see, what they believe, and how they act upon information, often without transparency or accountability.

Recent research coordinated by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has revealed that generative AI assistants, already in use by millions of people, routinely misrepresent news content. Of the 3,000 responses analysed from major AI platforms, 45 per cent of the responses contained significant factual or sourcing errors. This confirms that unverified AI outputs can distort public understanding and ultimately undermine confidence in democracy itself. Not to mention, the immense financial damage that the use of AI by search platforms is causing to the news industry.

## **SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS**

The polarization of societies is eroding public trust and it is creating an increasingly confrontational climate in which the media are on the front line. Across the region, east and west of Vienna, we have seen how protests have evolved into flashpoints where journalists face harassment, intimidation, and, at times, violence from both state and non-state actors.

The safety of journalists in the OSCE region is under unprecedented pressure. Numbers on attacks against journalists monitored by different organizations vary quite substantially, from 124 attacks recorded by the Council of Europe Platform on Safety of Journalists to 428 instances documented by the Mapping Media Freedom Platform. For Serbia alone, the Public Prosecution of the Republic of Serbia has documented attacks against 99 journalists<sup>1</sup> so far this year. These are official figures. This is an extraordinarily high number. What is clear is that the number of attacks and incidents across the OSCE region is unacceptably high and increasing both east and west of Vienna. Journalists face online harassment, targeted smear campaigns, and, in many cases, unfounded and abusive judicial prosecution for their reporting. The confrontational nature of protests, sometimes combined with inadequate respect for press freedom by law enforcement, has further escalated risks.

### **Law Enforcement and the Media**

In recent months I have noted with growing concern the excessive use of force, intimidation and access restrictions by law-enforcement personnel against journalists covering public protests. Across multiple jurisdictions there are credible, documented instances in which journalists – wearing identifiable press markings, including “Press” vests and accreditation, have been subjected to pepper spray, rubber bullets, stun grenades, physical assault, arbitrary detention or equipment seizure.

During the reporting period, attacks on journalists by law enforcement during public demonstrations have risen significantly. Reported violations included restricted media access to protest sites, arbitrary detentions and searches, confiscation or destruction of equipment, and verbal abuse. For example, in Serbia, the Committee to Protect Journalists has reported that between June and September at least 28 journalists have been attacked by law enforcement during demonstrations, despite their wearing “Press” vests and showing credentials.<sup>2</sup> In Georgia, on 8 September, several journalists who were clearly identifiable as press while reporting on protests, were assaulted by onlookers, ostensibly supporters of the government. Video evidence from the scene shows that

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.vrhovnojt.gov.rs/sr/bezbednost-novinara>

<sup>2</sup> See: [Serbia police target journalists as anti-government protests escalate - Committee to Protect Journalists](#)

police officers either failed to intervene or were themselves somehow involved in the attacks.<sup>3</sup> In Türkiye, between May and September 2025, at least five journalists were subjected to aggressive crowd control measures and temporarily detained, while covering protests in Istanbul and Ankara, again, as documented by the Mapping Media Freedom platform.<sup>4</sup> In the United States of America, the US Press Freedom Tracker recorded 86 incidents of targeted attacks this year by police against journalists while covering protests nationwide, while Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted 60 attacks in Los Angeles alone.<sup>5</sup> In France, during the reporting period, Article 19 and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have documented police violence against journalists, including instances of journalists being pepper-sprayed, beaten, and detained during public demonstrations, although being clearly identifiable as “Press.”<sup>6</sup> And RSF has pointed out that these police behaviours are violations of press freedom and they contravene France’s National Law Enforcement Plan (SMO) from 2021. While such policies may be in place across the OSCE region, there appears to be a question of training and follow-up procedures. I remind that provisions regarding this are contained in the Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018.

In several participating States, including Germany, the Netherlands, Georgia, and Serbia, my Office has observed incidents where journalists covering public protests were subjected to harassment or violence by protesters or bystanders, and in some cases, also by law enforcement authorities. In some cases, law enforcement did not intervene adequately to prevent or stop such attacks.

These incidents reflect broader systemic risks for media freedom across the OSCE region. Law enforcement often fails to distinguish journalists from protesters or to adapt tactics to ensure reporter safety. Investigations and accountability are often inadequate, contributing to a climate of impunity. This trend represents a structural and systemic challenge to media freedom, fundamental rights, and democratic governance.

However, good practices do exist in several jurisdictions. For instance, in Austria the introduction of dedicated Media Contact Officers, so-called “Dialog-polizei”, during demonstrations illustrates how law enforcement bodies can create liaison functions to support on-site safety. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the PersVeilig initiative created jointly by the police, Public Prosecution Service, and journalist organizations to protect journalists from aggression and threats, serves as a contact point and helpdesk for media professionals. In Germany, the Saxony police have a designated unit with special mobile police teams to protect and facilitate the work of media during protests and demonstrations.

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/09/11/georgia-journalists-attacks-by-ruling-party-activists-and-police/>

<sup>4</sup> See: [Mapping Media Freedom - Alert Explorer](#)

<sup>5</sup> See: [USA: RSF appalled by LAPD's repeated violence against journalists | RSF](#)

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.article19.org/resources/france-new-resurgence-of-police-violence-against-journalists-must-end/>

I encourage participating States to follow these good practices and to appoint both police liaison teams as well as to provide adequate training for police on human rights compliant policing of demonstrations. At the same time, efforts to promote journalists' safety must never restrict journalists' ability to report freely.

In light of this evolving phenomenon, I aim to address this matter specifically through my Office's project on the Safety of Journalists in the coming months. I urge all OSCE participating States to systematically implement their commitments under OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on the Safety of Journalists, which calls on States to ensure that journalists can carry out their work safely and without risk of violence, intimidation, or harassment. This includes creating an enabling environment for journalists to report freely during public demonstrations, taking measures to prevent unlawful interference by law enforcement, and ensuring accountability for any violations that might occur.

### **Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)**

The growing use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) targeting journalists and media outlets across the OSCE region remains a central concern of my Office. Research done by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) shows that media outlets are now the most frequent targets of SLAPPs, followed closely by journalists, and that over 91 percent of cases occur entirely within domestic jurisdictions. Journalists covering corruption, government conduct, business interests and environmental matters are the most commonly targeted. These actions are not intended to prevail on their merits; rather, they aim to intimidate, silence and financially exhaust their targets. This phenomenon is widespread across the OSCE region, East and West of Vienna. The abuse of legal systems through SLAPPs directly contradicts OSCE commitments by fostering a media climate of fear and self-censorship.

In my country visits and in numerous meetings with government authorities, I continue to raise the dangers posed by SLAPPs and to advocate for the passage of domestic anti-SLAPPs legislation, in line also with recommendations from the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO. In meetings with representatives of participating States I have encouraged them to adopt and implement protective measures, such as early dismissal mechanisms, cost-shifting provisions, and awareness raising initiatives. I would like to reiterate this call to all participating States today.

### **Surveillance**

Over past years, there have been a growing number of reports on the use of advanced surveillance technologies, ranging from invasive spyware to intrusive corporate

surveillance. Digital technologies are increasingly deployed for repression and political control, including of journalists and dissident voices. As stated by my predecessor, Teresa Ribeiro, in her Communiqué on Surveillance from 2023, the intrusive use of spyware stands in direct contradiction to OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom.

Ministerial Council Decision No.3/2018 explicitly calls on participating States to take measures to protect journalists from intimidation and harassment, including through digital technologies and to ensure that legal frameworks allow them to communicate safely, maintain confidentiality of sources, and report without fear of surveillance.

### **Foreign Agent Laws**

In recent years, a growing number of OSCE participating States have introduced or proposed legislation targeting so-called “foreign influence” or “foreign agents,” typically focusing on local or international media outlets and civil society organizations receiving support from foreign entities. While authorities often justify such measures on ostensibly legitimate grounds of transparency, national sovereignty, or protection against foreign interference, their scope, language, and implementation are often problematic from a freedom of expression and media freedom perspective.

Such laws often do not conform with OSCE commitments on media freedom, they are frequently vague and overbroad, lacking clear definitions of key concepts such as “political activity” or “foreign influence,” creating significant legal uncertainty. This ambiguity facilitates abuse, politically motivated targeting, and discriminatory application. Many laws also fail to guarantee effective legal remedies, leaving affected organizations without meaningful avenues for redress.

What is more, the “foreign agent” label stigmatizes, and in some cases criminalises, legitimate journalistic work, particularly when exposing corruption, human rights abuses, or merely criticizing government policies. Foreign Agent legislation should be continuously assessed against the test of legality, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality to ensure that they are not applied in a manner that undermines the commitments set out in the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE documents.

Against this backdrop, my Office, together with external experts, is working on a set of recommendations for OSCE participating States in order to advise on how to pursue legitimate interests without silencing independent and critical media. For this purpose, we recently convened a structured dialogue to critically assess the implications of foreign agent legislation on freedom of the media across the OSCE region.

These concerns also relate directly to OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/2018, which underscores the responsibility of participating States to ensure that journalists can carry out their work safely and without undue legal or administrative constraints.

Dear colleagues,

My Office addresses the most pressing challenges to the safety of journalists across the OSCE region, recognizing that threats, harassment, and violence against media professionals not only endanger individuals but also undermine the free flow of information essential to democratic governance, as clearly stated in the Helsinki Final Act and numerous successive declarations on which participating States have reached consensus and committed to implement, most significantly Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on Safety of Journalists. In line with these commitments and my Mandate, my Office works actively to support participating States in implementing practical measures to prevent attacks against journalists, to ensure accountability for violations, and to create safer environments for independent reporting. However, despite the clear guidance offered by policy recommendations developed by my Office over years, implementation of core commitments related to safety of journalists and media freedom remains inconsistent, and much more systematic action, supported by political will, is clearly needed by States to meet their commitments.

Through advocacy, capacity-building, legal reviews of draft legislation, and the direct engagement with authorities, media organizations, and civil society, my Office works to support the implementation of OSCE commitments on media freedom. Activities carried out during the reporting period directly support these goals and demonstrate concrete steps toward operationalizing Decision No. 3/2018.

These initiatives include efforts to further cooperation among OSCE National Focal Points (NFPs) on Safety of Journalists to enhance their ability to monitor and guide the implementation of MC Decision 3/2018 at the national level. So far 38 participating States have nominated National Focal Points for Safety of Journalists. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage those who yet have not done so, to designate their focal point at their earliest convenience.

As the media landscape is evolving, so too must we continue to develop our messaging and communications approaches. In recognition of this my Office has published a series of seven podcasts<sup>7</sup> featuring expert recommendations on critical areas such as digital safety, legal harassment, and the fight against impunity. By raising awareness and deepening understanding of the diverse challenges to journalists' safety, this initiative contributes to the implementation of preventive measures consistent with Decision

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<sup>7</sup> See: [OSCE Safety of Journalists Series](#)

3/2018's call to protect journalists from violence, threats, and harassment, including those perpetrated online. We shall continue podcasting in 2026.

### **Environmental Journalism**

My Office has also addressed the specific challenges faced by journalists who cover climate and environmental topics. We were glad to address this issue at events organised by the Second Dimension Committee, and to ensure that the expertise of colleagues from the Second Dimension is included in our work on this topic. The forthcoming "Practical Manual for Journalists on Reporting the Environment", that I will publish in the coming weeks in cooperation with UNESCO, is the first of two handbooks that aim at addressing the safety, legal and other professional challenges that journalists face in covering environmental topics.

### **Journalism in Exile**

My Office also remains committed to supporting practical measures to enhance the protection, professional sustainability, and safety of journalists across the OSCE region, ensuring that they can continue their essential work and uphold the free flow of information fundamental to democratic societies.

In several participating States, independent journalists can no longer operate safely and have been forced into exile. Their protection, professional sustainability, and ability to work safely are also consistent with the principles of Decision 3/2018. To this end, my Office launched the report "Enhancing Protection of Journalists under Severe Political Pressure", which focuses on journalists in exile and aims to raise awareness among participating States by offering a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by affected journalists and we also propose actionable recommendations for their protection and support.

### **Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO)**

Building on the broader concerns around the safety of journalists, it is crucial to recognize the specific risks faced by women journalists, who increasingly encounter both online harassment and offline violence. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of my Office's flagship project on the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) – a pioneering project launched to address the gender specific threats faced by women in media, particularly in digital spaces.

I take this opportunity to remind of the Joint Statement on the Safety of Women Journalists<sup>8</sup> issued by 45 participating States during the Skopje Ministerial Council in 2023. While not a consensual document, it does re-iterate the calls for action consensually agreed in 2018.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if we can achieve that 45 participating States actually implement their joint decisions on this topic, then that would be a highly significant contribution to the safety of women in journalism. And I encourage the implementation of the commitments thereby made.

## **Ukraine**

The lives of journalists working in Ukraine are under relentless threat. Ukraine now faces the highest number of journalist deaths in Europe since the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Time and again, I have raised alarm – at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, the Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU) Media Side Event, and the Vienna Conference on Journalists’ Safety, to name a few – yet with each passing month the number of casualties continues to climb. Over the reporting period, we have observed what appears to be the increased targeting of journalists and media infrastructure in Ukraine by Russian Federation military forces.

The deliberate use of FPV drones<sup>9</sup> to target and kill media workers in conflict zones is a deeply disturbing new dimension of violence against journalists. Journalists are no longer just caught in the crossfire; they are being hunted with precision from the sky.

Such attacks violate International Humanitarian Law, which explicitly protects civilians and journalists in conflict zones, and may trigger legal responsibility for war crimes.

I urge all participating States to uphold their obligations under international law, investigate breaches, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and reaffirm that the protection of journalists – even, and especially, in times of conflict – is indisputable.

I take this opportunity to remind of the 26 Ukrainian journalists arbitrarily detained by the Russian Federation and to call for their release.

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<sup>8</sup> See: [MC.DEL/51/23](#)

<sup>9</sup> *First Person View Drones / Operator Directed Drones*

## **ONLINE CHALLENGES**

### **Media and Big Tech**

Last month, I launched our Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI, a major undertaking for the Office developed with the expertise and guidance of over 150 practitioners, scholars, and stakeholders from across the OSCE region. The Manual provides a set of detailed policy recommendations for promoting media viability, visibility, and vigilance, offering both immediate interventions and longer-term structural guidance grounded in international human rights standards and OSCE commitments.

While the launch of the Policy Manual represents a significant milestone, it is only a starting point. The real challenge now is to bring these principles out of the Hofburg and to line ministries in capitals and practical policymaking processes. Participating States are encouraged to actively engage with the Manual, implement its guidance in national contexts, and translate recommendations into actionable measures that ensure pluralism, independence, and the resilience of public-interest journalism in an era of concentrated digital power and AI-driven information flows. I hope that the Policy Manual will assist participating States to centre regulatory frameworks on human rights due diligence, transparency, accountability, and public oversight. My Office and I stand ready to engage with all of you, and with the OSCE executive structures in doing so.

### **Joint Declaration 2025**

For more than 20 years, the freedom of expression mandate holders<sup>10</sup> have come together every year to issue a Joint Declaration – with standard-setting recommendations – on a specific issue we see as fundamental for freedom of expression. This year, we launched a Joint Declaration on AI, Freedom of Expression, and Media Freedom<sup>11</sup>.

The Declaration complements the Policy Manual by setting out principles to safeguard freedom of expression, promote a pluralistic and diverse information environment, ensure transparency and accountability, and foster multi-stakeholder cooperation.

In essence, the Declaration translates our core human rights principles into the AI context: protecting pluralism, independent journalism, and democratic values in the digital age. Implementing these principles will require policy innovation and practical adaptation, but the underlying rights remain enduring and universal.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

<sup>11</sup> See: [Joint Declaration on AI, Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom | OSCE](#)

## **Disinformation and Media Literacy**

Addressing disinformation requires a comprehensive and principled approach – one that strengthens, rather than constrains, the free flow of information. This includes promoting independent and sustainable public service media, investing in ethical, high-quality journalism, and integrating media literacy into education systems to build long-term societal resilience. My Office continues to actively advance these goals, working with participating States and partners to reinforce the integrity of the information space.

Throughout the reporting period, I have consistently underscored that the manipulation of information threatens not only media freedom, but also democracy and security. I am increasingly concerned that societies are losing consensus on the core principles of our democratic systems, and that citizens no longer agree on shared facts – a dangerous shift that undermines informed public discourse and, ultimately, societal cohesion. Countering disinformation must therefore be rooted in human rights, media freedom, pluralism, and open debate, not in restriction, censorship, or control.

In an effort to develop strategies to counter disinformation, my Office has taken a leading role in fostering structured dialogues on the nexus between media freedom and security, breaking the discussion into key thematic areas such as security sector governance and reform, and violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT). These exchanges have brought together representatives of governments, civil society, academia, and the media to identify practical ways to enhance resilience while safeguarding fundamental freedoms, and have depended on the close collaboration between my Office and respective departments within the OSCE Secretariat such as the Conflict Prevention Centre and the Transnational Threats Department's Action Against Terrorism Unit. The outcomes of these meetings, including a set of actionable recommendations, will be published within the framework of my Office's project on Media Freedom and Security.

I welcome the emergence of principles-based, rights-respecting national counter-disinformation strategies in several participating States, including Ireland and Norway. These initiatives focus on citizens' empowerment rather than control, combining education, accountability, and targeted support for independent media. Independent experts contributing to our discussions have repeatedly affirmed that information integrity and media freedom are mutually reinforcing — and that societies are most resilient when journalists can work without fear, citizens are well-informed, and governments are open and trustworthy.

Experience from Finland and France and other participating States underscore the importance of integrating media literacy into the education system curricula, the earlier

the better. We have just started an initiative to collect media literacy curricula from participating states in order to collate them in a compendium that could inspire and encourage a collective media literacy initiative across the OSCE region. Much interesting work is ongoing and I believe we can benefit from an overview of current practices and experiences.

### **Public Service Media and Regulators**

Independent and adequately funded public service media, supported by strong and independent regulatory bodies, are indispensable to democratic resilience and trust in information.

I continue to encourage participating States to strengthen the independence and sustainability of public service media and their regulatory frameworks. In line with the Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy of 2023<sup>12</sup>, I reiterate that well-resourced, politically independent public service media, together with robust independent regulators, are vital democratic assets for countering disinformation, maintaining public trust, and ensuring freedom of expression remains a reality in the digital age.

Today, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have issued a statement encouraging adequate and legally compliant funding for the statewide broadcaster, BHTV.

I invite participating States to engage with my Office to implement their OSCE commitments in this area. For example, since June, I have been actively involved in supporting the selection process for the new nine-member Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) in Serbia, following an official invitation by the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ana Brnabić. My involvement has focused on supporting efforts to facilitate a constructive and collaborative approach between Serbian authorities and media stakeholders, with the objective of safeguarding the integrity, credibility, and legality of the selection process in accordance with the Law on Electronic Media. This engagement is essential to enabling a new REM Council to fulfil its important mandate in society in an impartial, independent, and accountable manner.

### **Regional Conferences**

I was pleased to host two regional media conferences this year under the overall theme “Actioning Media Viability for Informed and Resilient Societies”: the 25th Central Asia Media Conference (13–14 November, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) and the 10th South-East

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<sup>12</sup> See: [542676.pdf](#)

Europe Media Conference (29–30 May 2025, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). I am grateful for the constructive engagement and support provided by the authorities of the conference host countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Uzbekistan. Both events provided valuable platforms for regional and multi-stakeholder networking, grounded in a shared commitment to advancing media freedom and viability. Each conference brought together more than 130 participants – including journalists, media experts, civil society representatives, academics, and government officials – to exchange experiences, innovative strategies, and practical approaches. These conferences help inform my Office of the needs and opportunities for engagement in support of OSCE commitments. They also lay the foundation for sustained regional co-operation, enabling participants to strengthen professional networks, build solidarity within the media sector, and launch collaborative initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I wish to reaffirm the utmost importance I place on the Mandate entrusted to me. At its core, this Mandate requires engaging constructively with authorities, ascertaining the facts surrounding developments affecting media freedom, and supporting tangible progress in the implementation of our shared OSCE commitments. Through continuous dialogue, monitoring, and targeted assistance, my Office strives to strengthen the conditions for independent, pluralistic, and professional media across our participating States. The “early warning” function of my Mandate is no less important, and instructs me to monitor developments in all 57 participating States and to advocate and promote full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media. The extent of my public and diplomatic engagements in this regard is reflected in the annex to this report.

I am working to develop a more systematic approach to implement and measure progress on MC Decision 3/2018, while continuing our strong collaboration with civil society, journalists’ associations, and media freedom organizations. Listening closely to those on the frontlines – journalists and media professionals – we aim to transform commitments into practical protection and support mechanisms.

In this regard, individual RFoM reports on media freedom issues in a number of participating States are under preparation. These reports will list media developments observed since January and will include an analytical section with references to OSCE media freedom commitments and requests for clarifications and suggestions for improvements in the participating State concerned. I had hoped to have several reports completed in time for this report to the Permanent Council, however capacity limitations

and a heavy workload on other matters has led to a delay. We shall continue with this systematic approach for media freedom developments also in 2026.

I wish to thank the Finnish Chairpersonship for placing media freedom high on their agenda, and I welcome that the incoming Swiss Chairpersonship will continue to prioritize this essential issue.

Engagement by the participating States with my Office has been encouraging, yet the full promise of these commitments can only be realized through sustained action. Implementation of Ministerial Council Decision 3/2018 remains limited.

My mandate is unique: It represents the only intergovernmental mechanism dedicated to the protection of media freedom. Yet my Office operates on just one percent<sup>13</sup> of the OSCE's Unified Budget, primarily covering the cost of 11 staff, while most operational activities and an additional 13 staff members rely on the generous support of participating State donors whose contributions I warmly acknowledge. In an era of budgetary constraints our cooperation with the Secretariat, autonomous institutions and executive structures, including field operations, becomes ever more vital.

Dear colleagues,

The stakes could not be higher: media freedom is not a luxury, it is a strategic investment in democracy, public trust and, ultimately, in security. Every step we take to protect journalists, safeguard independent ethical media, and foster trustworthy information is a direct investment in accountable governance and the safety of our societies. Let us ensure that these principles are not only upheld in word but realized in action. What is needed now is not mere reaffirmation, but concrete realization through legislation, enforcement, and steadfast political will.

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<sup>13</sup> 1,608,000 Euros