



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1019 Vienna, 16 October 2014

EU Statement on Freedom of Expression in the OSCE area

The European Union remains concerned about violations of media freedom and freedom of expression in our region. We recall that media freedom and freedom of expression are cornerstones of the OSCE's comprehensive security concept. We have expressed our appreciation to the Representative on Freedom of the Media for her ongoing efforts to monitor and support the continuous implementation of our common commitments in this area.

Today, we would like to highlight a number of recent cases of specific concern. In doing so, we also acknowledge that the RFoM raises issues of concern within the EU, including recently. We take these comments very seriously and are committed to engaging with her as we seek to implement in full our OSCE commitments. We also wish to express our appreciation for the recent communiqué by the RFoM on the impact of anti-extremism legislation on freedom of expression. This includes messages relevant to all participating States, including in the EU.

Concerning other recent developments in our region, in Tajikistan, a large number of websites and social media platforms have been blocked in recent months and weeks, and mobile internet access appears to have been restricted in parts of the country. We echo the concern of the RFoM on this worrying trend, and call on the authorities of Tajikistan to ensure that their practices are in line with their OSCE commitments.

In Kazakhstan, critical media outlets continue to be under pressure, including through disproportionate sanctions for minor administrative violations.

More than 30 media outlets have been closed since late last year, according to the RFoM, who has expressed disappointment at the Kazakhstan Supreme Court decision to uphold the closure of Pravdivaya Gazeta. We call on the Kazakh authorities to reverse this negative trend and make use of the expertise and advice provided by the RFoM.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the shrinking space for free expression in the Russian Federation, and repeats its call for urgent measures to bring laws and practices in line with our OSCE commitments. Yesterday, President Putin signed into law legislative changes imposing new limitations on foreign media ownership in the country. This is a further step towards a consolidation of state control on the Russian media landscape, severely endangering media freedom and media pluralism online and offline. Furthermore, we join the RFoM in her concern about the increase in violence and harassment against journalists in Russia, including the targeting of journalists seeking to raise the truth surrounding the deaths of Russian servicemen killed in Ukraine, as well as the registration of the Soldier's Mothers, a very respectable NGO, as a "Foreign Agent". Another recent example of these acts of violence and harassments was the incident involving a BBC crew on September 16 in Astrakhan. We also recall that last week marked the 8th anniversary of the murder of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, and we once again strongly urge the Russian Federation to take every measure to identify and punish those ultimately responsible for this crime.

In Azerbaijan, we deplore recent developments that are leading to a severely shrinking public space for expression, and are limiting public debate issues of democracy and human rights. In addition to those currently in detention, we continue to closely follow the situation of journalist Khadija Ismayil who was recently briefly detained at Baku airport and is currently subject to a travel ban. The RFoM has raised several other individual cases, and the European Union will continue to follow closely these issues, as well as broader developments in Azerbaijan.

We welcome the fact that OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović had recently paid a visit to Belarus. We encourage Belarusian

authorities to improve the situation of media freedom in the country, including the media legislation. We reiterate in particular our call to the Belarusian authorities to reform the mandatory accreditation requirements for journalists: the ongoing practice of hindering freelance journalists working for foreign media outlets in Belarus without accreditation has to stop. We also express our concern regarding detentions of journalists.

On a positive note, we are pleased to welcome the recent ruling of the Constitutional Court in Turkey on October 2, restricting the powers of the telecommunications authority TIB to block websites due to national security reasons and to retain data.

The European Union will continue to actively promote freedom of expression and media freedom within the OSCE, including in the run up to the Basel ministerial council.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.