



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1313 Vienna, 13 May 2021

EU Statement in response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her first report. We appreciate the efforts Ms. Ribeiro has undertaken to date in her role and share her worry about the shrinking space for media freedom and continued decline of safety of journalists in the OSCE region. We also share the RFoM's view that the ongoing health crisis has further amplified negative trends that were already developing or existed in some participating States where there is a tendency to control the flow of information and to silence critical voices.

There is a clear interconnection between democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to security, and free speech and independent media. Attacks and undue restrictions, both online and offline, on journalists and media actors, are not only a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also a threat against our common security. The monitoring and assistance by the RFoM are therefore more important than ever in light of profoundly troubling trends regarding freedom of expression and media freedom in many parts of the OSCE area.

The EU shares the RFoM's view that the rapid deterioration of the situation for media and journalists in Belarus warrants our special attention. We have repeatedly brought up issues regarding the negative implications of the political developments in Belarus on the work of media outlets, as well as the continued persecution and harassment of

journalists and other media actors. We also echo the RFoM's concern regarding legislative amendments, which further aggravate the already dire situation of media freedom in Belarus.

We also share the RFoM's concern over the deliberate abuse faced by journalists in the Russian Federation, including while covering public gatherings in support of Alexei Navalny, as well as the further expansion of the “foreign agents” laws in order to restrict the work of independent media platforms, as well as individual journalists and media actors.

We echo the RFoM's call on all participating States, including Belarus and Turkey, to immediately release all arbitrarily detained journalists and media actors.

The RFoM has highlighted a number of concerns across the OSCE region, including in EU Member States, on issues related to media regulation and safety of journalists. The report clearly demonstrates that freedom of expression and media freedom can never be taken for granted. We must safeguard and promote it tirelessly and constantly. To this end, EU Member States seek to engage fully with the RFoM, and deeply appreciate these exchanges. We encourage all participating States to maintain a dialogue with the RFoM, to reflect carefully upon her recommendations and follow up on them.

We are pleased that the Swedish Chairpersonship has committed itself to keep the focus on the issues of freedom of expression and media freedom throughout the year. We recall the 1st Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Media Freedom and Gender Equality organized in March and look forward to the upcoming Media Freedom Conference on 18-19 May as an excellent opportunity for a substantial discussion with media and civil society representatives on many of the concerns highlighted today.

The EU fully supports the work of the RFoM, in particular on thematic issues such as the safety of journalists, the fight against disinformation and information manipulation, and the impact of artificial intelligence on freedom of expression. We welcome your recent communique on the freedom of the press to work freely in the OSCE region regardless of frontiers. We also await your report on judicial abuse and legal

harassment, as well as guidance on issues related to artificial intelligence, and particularly, additional guidance on steps to protect women journalists online.

Let me finish by underlining our full support for the autonomy and 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, both online and offline. The EU continues to stand firmly by the RFoM. We again thank the Representative and her able team for their tireless and much needed work, and wish you all success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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