



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1397 Vienna, 3 November 2022

EU statement in response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, and on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the RFoM, Ms Teresa Ribeiro, and thanks for her report. Dear Madame Representative, we greatly appreciate and value your professionalism, independence and integrity in implementing the RFoM's mandate. We equally applaud the outstanding work of your team, particularly under the present circumstances. We underline our full support for the autonomous mandate of the Representative and the manner in which it is being executed by Ms Ribeiro.
2. 2 November marked the *International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists*, dedicated to all journalists and other media actors who have been threatened, suffered attacks, or lost their lives in the exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression. Your work, Madame Representative, is an indispensable part of holding us all accountable to our commitments, not least from Milan 2018, to take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists.
3. Comprehensive security is the basis of our organisation. There can be no security without full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In establishing the position of RFoM 25 years ago, participating States reaffirmed that free expression and free media are cornerstones of our common security, and recognized that further instruments were needed to safeguard them. The RFoM remains a crucial and vital instrument for the promotion of these fundamental principles and for protecting against their erosion.

4. Among the many crucial tools at the disposal of the Representative, the work regarding not least safety of journalists online as well as offline is more important than ever, and we recall that the recent Moscow Mechanism reports concluded that journalists and media actors have been deliberately targeted, killed, abducted, injured and tortured by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. The RFoM has also highlighted the disappearance, detention and abduction of journalists or their relatives, including Zhanna Kiselyova, Iryna Dubchenko, Dmitro Khiliuk, Oleksandr Gunko, Victoria Roshchina, Oleh Baturyn, Yevgeniya Boryan, Yuliya Olkhovskaya, Lyubov Chaika and Svetlana Zalizetskaya. We call on Russia to abide by its commitments and stop these deeply concerning, unacceptable and dangerous practices. Journalists covering conflicts are afforded protection under international humanitarian law. Any attack against them is a war crime.
5. In light of the negative trends in many parts of the OSCE area and especially considering the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the early warning and rapid response function of the RFoM has particularly proven its *raison d'être*. We recall that the most recent Moscow Mechanism report made a clear connection between internal repression and external aggression and concluded that a sort of military censorship completely banning anti-war protests is in place in Russia, and that mass media and the Internet have been regulated in such a way as to radically restrict access to information, not least shown with the blocking of thousands of websites and the declaration of many organisations providing information as “extremist” or “undesirable” organisations. We echo the RFoM in that the largest and most systematic crackdown on independent media in our region for the past 25 years has taken place in Russia. The draconian measures, including those of sentences of up to 15 years in prison for telling the truth about the war, have suffocated the last remainders of independent journalism, such as Novaya Gazeta, Meduza, Dozhd, Radio Ekho Moskvy and New Times. Local media in Russian provinces suffer the same fate. We are deeply concerned with the accelerated internal repression, including cases against the journalists, Andrei Zayakhin, Ivan Safronov, Alexandra Bayasitova, Mikhail Afanasyev, and Sergei Mikhailov and others who have either left Russia or are still in the country. We reiterate our call on Russia to abide by its commitments and to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained.

6. We agree with the RFoM's assessment that the media freedom situation in Belarus is in a constant downward spiral and that journalists and media actors continue to face judicial reprisals and lengthy prison sentences for their independent reporting. The EU urges Belarus to end the ongoing crackdown on independent media and to immediately drop the persecution of media actors including Kseniya Lutskina, Irina Slaunikova, Denis Ivashin, Andrei Aliaksandrau, Dzmitry Navazhylau, Iryna Leushyna, Yury Hantsarevich, Aliaksandr Ivulin, Igor Losik, Yahor Marsinovich, Eduard Palchys, Andrey Skurko, Vladimir Tsyganovich, Katerina Andreyeva and Andrzej Poczobut All journalists and media actors imprisoned by the Lukashenka regime must be immediately and unconditionally released and rehabilitated.
7. The EU reiterates the concern of the RFoM regarding the "Draft Bill on the Amendment of the Press Law and Some Laws" that was passed just two weeks ago in Türkiye and that the vague definitions and broad scope of the law can lead to arbitrary and politically motivated actions at the expense of freedom of expression. We are also concerned about the ban imposed on *Deutsche Welle* and *Voice of America*.
8. The EU echoes the RFoM's call on Tajikistan for the release of Abdullo Ghurbati and Daler Imomali. Their ongoing detention adds to the high number of journalists behind bars. Legal harassment, including criminal prosecution of journalists and arbitrary detentions for their professional activities, have a strong chilling effect on media pluralism, thereby weakening journalistic freedom in the OSCE region, including in Azerbaijan, where the RFoM has raised these issues. We reiterate our deep concern about the growing number of imprisoned journalists and media actors in Azerbaijan.
9. We welcome that the RFoM highlights issues across the region, demonstrating that no country is immune to shortcomings. In advancing media freedom and freedom of expression within the EU, we remain committed to engaging fully with the RFoM. We also welcome the RFoM's close engagement with representatives of civil society and independent media. Such outreach plays a key role in providing early warning and rapid response when states fall short of implementing their commitments.

10. The EU shares many of the concerns highlighted in the RFoM report. We particularly appreciate the RFoM's continued attention to safety of journalists, safety of female journalists online, gender-based violence, artificial intelligence, disinformation, and media freedom literacy. All participating States have unequivocally committed to abstain from propaganda for war. We look forward to the upcoming report on countering disinformation, especially in light of Russian state-controlled media spreading disinformation and propaganda concerning its war of aggression against Ukraine.

11. The RFoM is a unique resource for participating States. Madame Representative, your outstanding and professional work has earned you great respect and the EU encourages all participating States to engage constructively and in good faith with you and to draw on the expertise of your Office.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA* and MONTENEGRO*, the Potential Candidate Country BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN align themselves with this statement.

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