



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Special Permanent Council No. 1372 Vienna, 5 May 2022

EU Statement on the World Press Freedom Day

1. The World Press Freedom Day is an occasion to reflect on the indispensable role that free, diverse and independent media plays in society. Without freedom of expression and free media, an informed and engaged citizenry is impossible. In the OSCE, it is a reminder that freedom of expression lies at the core of the comprehensive concept of security. There is a clear link between democratic, peaceful, and inclusive societies that contribute to our joint security, and free expression and independent media. We welcome this year's global theme Journalism under Digital Siege, as media freedom and access to information are as essential online as they are offline. It is crucial that journalists and media actors perform their work safely, independently and without undue interference or influence. In Milan 2018, we all committed to respect, promote, and protect the freedom to seek, receive and impart information regardless of frontiers, also by ensuring a safe working environment for journalists.
2. However, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – which we condemn in the strongest terms - is a blatant proof of utter disrespect for international law and our common OSCE commitments. The Moscow Mechanism report concluded that journalists and media actors have been killed, abducted, injured and tortured by the Russian forces in Ukraine. They have also been detained and put under pressure to cooperate with the invading force. At least 10 TV towers have been destroyed or damaged. In the areas under Russia's military control, local media have been prevented from operating or have been used to broadcast Russian propaganda. Access to Ukrainian channels and social networks, and many other channels such as BBC News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty or the Voice of America media outlets, has been blocked. We strongly urge the Russian Federation to immediately stop such attacks and practices.

3. Safety of journalists is an EU priority. The EU is providing emergency support to media outlets and journalists covering the war in Ukraine, including psychological support, helmets and other protective equipment, as well as financing to cover salaries.
4. Russia's external aggression is mirrored by internal repression, where independent voices are being silenced. Media outlets, including Novaya Gazeta, Meduza, Dozhd, Radio Ekho Moskv, Current Times and New Times as well as social media platforms like Meta and Twitter, have been blocked or forced to suspend their activities. Many journalists and media actors feel personally threatened and have been forced to leave Russia. As stated by the RFoM, the continuing denigration, stigmatization, intimidation and threats towards the media and journalists by Russia violate OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom. Despite the risk of long-term prison sentences and prolonged arrests, courageous independent media and individual journalists strive to inform about the war waged by the Russian leadership against Ukraine and the atrocities committed against Ukrainian people.
5. By reporting from the front lines and shedding light on the gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Russian Armed Forces, journalists and media actors importantly contribute to counter disinformation and information manipulation surrounding the invasion. They play a crucial role in ensuring that these atrocities do not remain unpunished. Those responsible will be held accountable for their actions.
6. As we highlight Russia's horrifying actions, we cannot ignore the worrying developments in other parts of the OSCE region. We strongly encourage all participating States, and in light of recent human rights and media freedom indexes, in particular Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to take decisive steps to fully respect their commitments.
7. We urge Belarus to end the ongoing crackdown on independent media and reiterate our urgent call to immediately drop the persecution of media workers in retaliation for their work, including criminal charges against media workers Katerina Andreyeva, Raman Pratasevich, Iryna Slavnikov, Denis Ivashin, Sergey Gordievich, Eduard Palchys, Vladimir Tsyganovich, Igor Losik and many others.

8. In Turkey, the EU continues to follow with great concern the ongoing juridical proceedings against media actors and human rights activists, including Mehmet Baransu, Yasemin Çongar, Yıldırım Oğur, Sedef Kabaş, Erol Önderoğlu, Ahmet Nesin and Şebnem Korur Fincancı. We echo the RFoM's encouragement to the authorities to take concrete and meaningful steps to revise the widely interpreted national anti-terrorism laws and bring these in line with OSCE commitments and international standards, including the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, so as to ensure effective protection of the fundamental human right to freedom of expression.
9. In Azerbaijan, the newly adopted law "On Media" poses significant limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, as outlined in the RFoM's legal analysis. The EU encourages Azerbaijan to review and incorporate the RFoM's recommendations into the law.
10. All participating States should scrutinize the implementation of their commitments and obligations related to freedom of expression and the media independence. We are aware that the EU and its Member States are not immune to shortcomings in this field, including with respect to the safety of journalists. To that end, Member States seek to engage with the RFoM and deeply appreciate these exchanges.
11. The RFoM is a unique and valuable resource for participating States, and the EU stands firmly by the institution and its mandate. We call on all participating States to engage constructively with the RFoM, to heed the concerns raised, and to draw on her Office's expertise to remedy shortcomings.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

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