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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 10 - 21 September 2018

EU statement – Working Session 2: Freedom of the Media (specifically selected topic)

Madam Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, remains a top priority for the European Union. There is a clear link between open, peaceful and prosperous societies that contribute to our joint security, and free expression and free media. It is crucial that states live up to their international obligations and OSCE commitments in this regard, first and foremost to refrain from interference and censorship and to ensure a favourable environment for inclusive and pluralistic public debate, both online and offline.

We therefore strongly support the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, and his able team. His autonomous role and fearless voice is direly needed to provide early warning and rapid response when states fail to implement their commitments. The strong and flexible mandate the Representative must be preserved and his budget safeguarded.

The EU attaches the highest importance to the safety of journalists and other media actors. In many parts of our region journalists are increasingly subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, intimidation and violence in carrying out their work. We deplore the trend of threats, violence and hatred against female journalists. Sexual and gender-based harassment distorts the media landscape and threatens the future of free press. The EU is deeply concerned that all too often violations and crimes against journalists and other media actors in the OSCE region go unpunished, creating a chilling effect throughout society.

The EU has raised issues related to the safety of journalists in several OSCE participating States. In the Russian Federation, legislative steps to brand media outlets as



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"foreign agents" create a stigma on journalism which further undermines the safety of media actors. We are deeply concerned about the increasing level of intimidation, threats and violence against Russian journalists, and take this opportunity to request information on the investigation of the recent violent death of journalist Denis Suvorov. The majority of killings of journalists in Russia remain unsolved. In the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, illegally annexed by Russia, and in the parts of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russia-backed armed formations, enforced disappearances, harassment and threats of journalists and persons speaking out against the de facto authorities, contribute to the culture of fear, silence and self-censorship. We are deeply concerned by reports that Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseev continues to be held by Russia-backed armed formations in non-government-controlled Donetsk. We call for his immediate release.

The EU is deeply concerned about the high number of imprisoned journalists in Turkey. There are many cases that raise serious questions about the state of rule of law and the respect for human rights, notably the freedom of expression. The European Court of Human Rights has pointed out that criticism of governments should not attract criminal charges for serious offences such as belonging to or assisting a terrorist organization. We remain concerned about the sentences and trials against journalists associated with the media outlets of Cumhuriyet, Zaman (now closed), Özgür Gündem (now closed) and others, including the cases of Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan.

The EU is also concerned about the safety of journalists in Azerbaijan, notably the six-year sentence against Afgan Mukhtarli; in Belarus, notably the raids on the Tut.by and BelaPAN news agencies; and in Ukraine and the Western Balkans, as well as in other participating States. In Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the EU is concerned about pressure on journalists leading to self-censorship. The EU also remains committed to addressing our own shortcomings in the field of safety of journalists and working closely with the Representative on Freedom of the Media to this end.

In conclusion, we would like to put forward the following recommendations to participating States:



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- Fully respect their international obligations and commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom, in particular to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment so that journalists may perform their work independently and without undue interference.
- Take active steps to prevent and respond to violence and harassment against journalists ensuring that all those responsible are brought to justice, paying special attention to gender based violence online and offline.
- Engage constructively with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and make use of his expertise and recommendations.
- Respect the mandate and autonomy of the Representative and provide him with the necessary resources to fulfil the mandate.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area.

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