

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1005
Vienna, 19 June 2014**

**EU statement in response to the Report by the
Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Ms Dunja Mijatović**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic to the Permanent Council. We thank her for her comprehensive report. Her excellent work and that of her staff has, during this turbulent reporting period, yet again demonstrated the continued relevance of the autonomous institution of the RFoM, as well as its capacity to deliver on the mandate of the office. Media freedom remains a top priority for the EU in the OSCE and we reiterate our support for the Representative and her mandate.

Mr. Chairperson,

We greatly appreciate the frank and unbiased approach of the RFoM. We call on all OSCE participating States to engage constructively with her office, respect her mandate, and carefully consider her recommendations for improving implementation of our jointly agreed commitments. For our part, we have noted the issues raised in her report relating to the EU, including her statement on the judgment of the European Court of Justice on the “right to be forgotten”, and have communicated it to the relevant authorities. The RFoM remains a significant resource for participating States in the implementation of our commitments. The project on Open Journalism is a recent example of how the Representative helps us find ways to practically apply our commitments to freedom of expression and media freedom in the ever changing media landscape.

The further deterioration in media freedom in some parts of our region during the reporting period is alarming, not least in Ukraine, in the context of current developments of which we have spoken extensively. We once again condemn the attacks on journalists, including the tragic deaths of journalists on 18 February, 24 May and 17 June. We note the range of concerns raised by the

Representative about the situation in Ukraine. We call for the immediate release of journalists that have been taken hostage in eastern Ukraine. We also oppose other violations of media freedom commitments such as the illegal switching off of television channels. We share the concerns expressed by the Representative about the cases in which journalists have been denied entry into Ukraine, as well as cases where the de facto authorities in Crimea denied entry to journalists crossing into the peninsula. Together these and other actions are contributing to an ongoing information war, which serves to escalate the ongoing crisis. In this context we welcome the initiative by the RFoM on facilitating dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian journalists, and hope it will yield positive results. We also commend her broader engagement on all these issues, including her visits to Ukraine, including to Crimea.

As the Representative has said in several statements, the antidote to propaganda is a free and open public space for discussion and the exchange of ideas. It is therefore with deep concern that we note the trend towards a shrinking space for dissenting views within the Russian Federation, and mounting pressure on those who openly disagree with government policies as well as further repressive policies and actions that unduly restrict freedom of expression and the activities of independent media outlets, including those operating online. We renew our repeated calls for the Russian Federation to abide by its media freedom commitments. While we welcome that sentences have now been pronounced in the 2006 Politkovskaya case, we echo the RFoM's call for the masterminds of this crime to be identified and brought to justice.

Regrettably, this trend is reflected also in other parts of our region including in Azerbaijan and Turkey, where the voices of journalists are increasingly being silenced. In some countries being a journalist is indeed fraught with danger of attack, harassment, legal action, detention or imprisonment. We regret that we could not reach agreement on a decision on protection of journalists at the Kyiv Ministerial but this topic remains highly relevant and we look forward to future discussions on strengthening our commitments. In the meantime, we welcome the much needed engagement of the RFoM in this area.

The report of the RFoM also shows how several participating States are taking further steps to bring online and offline media outlets under state control, be it

through legislation, changes of ownership, blocking, censorship or legal proceedings against independent or critical media. We have previously expressed concern about such practices in Turkey, and Russia but we see similar developments in, for example, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, where we are concerned about the recent blocking of YouTube.

Much still remains to be done in the Western Balkans. We call on Serbia, as the incoming Chairmanship-in-Office, to continue working with the RFoM on issues of online censorship and other topics, in order to fulfil its promise to lead by example.

In closing, we would like to once again thank the Representative and her team for her outstanding, and much needed, work. We are pleased to welcome the Representative to Brussels tomorrow and look forward to continued cooperation in the upcoming reporting period.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO* and ICELAND+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.