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EU Response to the Representative for the Freedom of the Media

The European Union welcomes Mr Haraszti once again to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his latest report.

The EU would like to emphasise the importance we attach to the work of the Representative and his team. We welcome the fact that he exercises his mandate impartially throughout the OSCE area and, in this regard, the EU Member States who are referenced in this latest report have taken careful note of his comments and recommendations.

The EU shares the concern expressed by the RFOM with regard to the risk to journalists who report from armed conflicts in the public interest. This issue has been brought into sharp focus this year with the hostilities in Georgia. We deplore the loss of three journalists, including an EU national, who were killed during the conflict by the indiscriminate use of munitions, an act contrary to international humanitarian law.

The EU echoes Mr. Haraszti's call for free and safe access for journalists to all parts of Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

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We have noted from the report that attacks on journalists in the period under review occurred in a number of OSCE participating States. Such attacks undermine the basic democratic value of free expression and we urge participating States to pursue with full vigour the perpetrators of such crimes and to take measures to ensure that journalists may practise their livelihoods without risk to their lives

Many of the issues raised by the RFOM in his latest report have already been the subject of separate EU statements to the PC but we would like to comment on a few of these.

The EU notes with concern the situation expressed by the Representative with regard to broadcast licences in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. We would encourage the respective authorities to put in place legislative and regulatory frameworks that facilitate an effective pluralism of this important media form.

With regard to Belarus, the EU welcomes developments such as the recent roundtable co organised by Mr Haraszti and the OSCE Office in Minsk that took place earlier this week, and encourages the Government of Belarus authorities to continue to seek and implement advice by Mr Haraszti's office regarding media freedom.

With regard to media legislation in Kazakhstan, being a future Chairmanship-in-Office, once again we would like to emphasise the importance we attach to compliance with OSCE commitments related to freedom of expression and, to this end, we would encourage the Kazakh Government to avail of the legal advice offered by the Office of the Representative on a number of pieces of draft legislation.

The EU recalls the statement it made to the Permanent Council on 23 October concerning the conviction and imprisonment of the Uzbek journalist, Mr

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Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov in circumstances which challenge the credibility of Uzbekistan to comply with its OSCE commitments concerning freedom of the media and rule of law.

The EU would like to thank Mr Haraszti for the report of his assessment visit to Montenegro. This report demonstrates the undoubted value of such visits and we would encourage other participating States to extend invitations to the Representative to assess the current state of media freedom in their countries.

In conclusion, the EU would like to reaffirm the value we place on the regular activities of the Representative for the Freedom of the Media including legal reviews and training activities. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of his office, we would like to take this opportunity to wish Mr Haraszti and his team all the best as they move into their next decade.

La Croatie* et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine*, pays candidats ; l'Albanie, la Bosnie - Herzégovine et la Serbie, pays du processus de stabilisation et d'association et candidats potentiels ; l'Islande et la Norvège, pays de l'Association Européenne de libre-échange et membres de l'Espace économique européen, se rallient à cette déclaration.

*La Croatie et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine continuent à participer au processus de stabilisation et d'association.

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