



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No.1452 Vienna, 23 November 2023

#### **EU statement in response to the Report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Teresa Ribeiro**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), Ms Teresa Ribeiro, and thanks her for her report. Dear Madame Representative, we greatly appreciate and value the professionalism, independence, integrity, and dedication of yourself and your team in implementing the RFoM's mandate, particularly under the current circumstances. We underline our full support for the unique and autonomous mandate of the Representative.
2. The concept of comprehensive security is at the heart of the OSCE. At its core lies freedom of expression, media freedom, and safety of journalists. As the RFoM pointed out in her report, democracy continues to face a downward spiral, and the overall media freedom developments in the OSCE region continue to be of great concern. In this light, the monitoring and assistance provided by the RFoM and her office are more relevant than ever.
3. The fact that media freedom and security are closely interconnected is starkly illustrated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which causes immense suffering for Ukraine and its people and is a flagrant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, and OSCE principles and commitments. We deeply regret the number of journalists and other media actors who have lost their lives as a result of Russia's war of aggression.
4. The ongoing repression and crackdown on civil society – including journalists and other media actors – inside Russia is a significant enabler of its aggression

abroad. As the RFoM has repeatedly pointed out: there can be no security without media freedom.

Madame Representative,

5. We welcome the comprehensive outlook in your report, and the EU shares many of the concerns you outlined. We agree that a robust, free, and independent media is foundational to democratic societies, and that the media has a crucial democratic role that must be respected and safeguarded by participating States, especially during election periods. The increasing hostile behaviour against independent media, journalists and other media actors needs to be addressed. We welcome yesterday's launch of the Safety of Journalists toolbox as a practical instrument to help implement our commitments related to the topic. We also share your concerns regarding the various challenges in the digital realm, and reaffirm the EU's commitment to promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democratic principles in the digital space, and to promoting a human rights-based approach to new digital technologies, including with regard to artificial intelligence.
6. Women journalists are disproportionately targeted by online violence. This, of course, has severe consequences for plurality and democracy. As the RFoM has highlighted, studies show a clear causal relationship between online threats targeting women journalists and subsequent offline attacks. Accelerated efforts are therefore needed to address the safety of women journalists, both online and offline. In this regard, we welcome the launch of the RFoM Guidelines for Monitoring Online Violence against Female Journalists.
7. Furthermore, we appreciate RFoM's continued attention to the situation for journalists reporting from Ukraine in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion, and to the continuously deteriorating situation for media freedom and freedom of expression in Russia and Belarus.
8. We recall the RFoM's recent statements regarding the sentences against or arrests of Alsu Kurmasheva, Abdulmumin Gadzhiev, Mikhail Afanasyev, Ruslan Leviev and Michael Nacke in Russia, Alyaksandr Mantsevich, Vyacheslau Lazarau, Pavel Mazheika and Larysa Shchyrakova in Belarus, and Serhiy Tsyhipa in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, and many others. We reiterate our calls on Russia and on Belarus to release all those unjustly detained immediately and unconditionally. Those responsible for crimes against

journalists and media actors must be held accountable wherever these crimes are committed.

9. We welcome that the RFoM highlights media freedom issues in States across the OSCE region, which proves that we all have challenges that we need to address. We remain committed to engaging fully with the RFoM in order to advance media freedom and freedom of expression within the EU and its Member States. The RFoM is a unique resource for participating States.
10. We stand firmly with the RFoM and fully support the independent mandate and the outstanding manner in which it is executed. The EU encourages all participating States to engage constructively and in good faith with the institution, to draw on its expertise, and to ensure that the institution is adequately resourced and staffed.
11. All participating States have committed to creating an enabling environment for media freedom. With this in mind, and in order to promote media freedom, safeguard journalists and other media actors throughout the OSCE region, we are firmly of the view that the position of the RFoM – like all top leadership positions of our Organisation – should not be left vacant, especially in light of the current situation for media freedom, democracy, human rights and security.
12. Madame Representative, we wish you and the entire office continued success in all your future endeavours.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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