



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1374 Vienna, 19 May 2022

EU statement in response to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Teresa Ribeiro

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Teresa Ribeiro, to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive report.
2. We congratulate the RFoM on the 25th mandate anniversary with the theme “No Security Without Media Freedom”. Waging a war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has shown what can happen when there is no media freedom, when state-controlled media spread propaganda and disinformation, leaving a public without possibility of holding its government to account. As the RFoM points out, in 25 years we have never before witnessed the scale to which our media freedom commitments have been violated as during this last reporting period.
3. We share the RFoM's concerns about the fact that Ukraine's media and Internet infrastructure are being intentionally targeted by the Russian forces in an effort to disrupt access to information, including by means of cyberattacks.
4. Furthermore, the Moscow Mechanism report concluded that journalists and media actors have been killed, abducted, injured, and tortured by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. The RFoM also highlights the disappearance, detention and abduction of journalists or their relatives, including Iryna Dubchenko, Dmitro Khiliuk, Konstantin Ryzhenko, Oleksandr Gunko, Victoria Roshchina, Oleh Baturyn, Yevgeniya Boryan, Yuliya Olkhovskaya, Lyubov Chaika and Svetlana Zalizetskaya. By reporting from the front lines and shedding light on the gross violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law, including those that may amount to war crimes or crimes against

humanity 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 go unnoticed and can be brought to justice. Those responsible must and will be held accountable.

5. Russia's external aggression is mirrored by internal repression. The RFOM has outlined the most severe crackdown on free speech and media freedom in 25 years. The draconian measures, including those of sentences of up to 15 years in prison for telling the truth about the war, have suffocated the last remainders of independent journalism, such as Novaya Gazeta, Meduza, Dozhd, Radio Ekho Moskvyy, Current Times and New Times. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have been blocked or forced to suspend their activities.
6. In Belarus, journalists continue to be sentenced, arrested or detained for doing their work. We echo the RFoM's calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily detained journalists and condemnation of the authorities for the recent sentencing of Aleh Hruzdzilovich, Aliaksandr Ivulin, Igor Losik, Yahor Marsinovich, Eduard Palchys, Andrey Skurko, Vladimir Tsyganovich, and for pressing new criminal charges of high treason against Katerina Andreyeva.
7. We reiterate our encouragement to Azerbaijan to review and incorporate the RFoM's recommendations into its newly adopted law "On Media". We echo RFoM's concerns regarding Turkey, where a dozen journalists have been arrested and prosecuted during the reporting period. We also reiterate our encouragement for 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.
8. The EU supports the RFoM's continued work on Artificial Intelligence and the Policy Manual "Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression". The EU's Digital Service Act, also mentioned in the RFoM's report, is a valuable contribution to ensuring transparency, scrutiny, and accountability.

9. We applaud the RFoM's call on participating States to adopt a gender-responsive and intersectional approach in all measures to ensure the safety of women journalists, including in conflict situations. We echo the *Joint declaration on freedom of media and gender justice* that freedom of expression is critical for women's empowerment and equality, as well as for civil and political rights and full participation in public life. We note that that the Declaration highlights that "both sex and gender have been the basis for inequality and discrimination in the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression and that - while the Declaration focuses primarily on women - where appropriate, reference is made to LGBTQ+ individuals". We look forward to the anticipated toolbox with a set of recommendations regarding the Safety of Journalists.
10. We study carefully all RFoM recommendations directed towards us and we have answered the questions concerning EU sanctions on Russian state-owned outlets *RT* and *Sputnik's* broadcasting in the EU. In Helsinki 1975, we all committed to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression, but this is precisely how Russia's state apparatus is using *RT* and *Sputnik*, constituting a significant and direct threat to our public order and security. In view of the gravity of the situation, it was necessary – and consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms – to suspend these outlets' activities in the EU: not by means of a blanket ban, but through an exceptional, targeted and temporary measure, taken in a very specific, unprecedented context. Let us stress that, in the EU, there is always a possibility to take legal recourse.
11. The RFoM is a unique and invaluable resource for participating States. Her autonomous role is needed - now more than ever - to provide early warning and rapid response when states fall short in implementing their commitments. We stand firmly with the RFoM and fully support her independent mandate, which is flexible enough to respond to existing threats to media freedom, including in digital contexts, and to address emerging ones, such as those emanating from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
12. We thank the RFoM and her able team for their tireless, courageous and important work and wish you all every success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN, members 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.