



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1035 Vienna, 22 January 2014

EU Statement on Freedom of Expression in the OSCE Area

The murderous attack on the French magazine Charlie Hebdo on 7 January has once again put the spotlight on the fundamental importance of freedom of expression and freedom of the media. As all participating States have asserted, free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. The declaration adopted last week at the PC by the 57 participating States has clearly recalled the importance of these internationally recognised human rights. This attack was an effort to undermine our shared values and the European Union remains resolute in our commitment to defend them. We best honour the victims of these appalling acts by redoubling our efforts to protect free expression, however disturbing or provocative some people may find some of the opinions expressed.

In this context the response in some participating States to this atrocity is troubling. In Russia, the warning of the Russian Federal Service for Supervision in Telecommunications, Information Technology and Mass Communications, Roskomnadzor, to Russian media outlets against publishing religious cartoons is a heavy handed response that threatens to further curb media freedom.

In the meantime in Turkey, two journalists of the daily Cumhuriyet are under investigation for publishing cartoons from Charlie Hebdo. We renew our call on the Turkish authorities to ensure a safe and enabling environment for media actors to carry out their work independently and without fear of reprisals.

There have also been a number of other developments in recent weeks which are matters of concern for the European Union. In Azerbaijan, the raid on 26 December against Radio Azadliq, one of the few remaining independent voices in Azerbaijan, and its subsequent closure, is yet another example of an ongoing crackdown on media freedom and freedom of expression. Whilst we welcome the

release from detention of a number of journalists, announced by President Aliyev at the end of December, the broader trend remains of concern, and we recall cases we have previously raised, including the situation of Khadija Ismayilova.

The court decision by the Medeu district court in Almaty on 24 December to close Adam Bol magazine is a further matter of concern that reflects a negative trend towards the stifling of independent media outlets in Kazakhstan. The free flow of information, allowing journalists to report on sensitive topics, supports Kazakhstan's efforts to build a participatory and prosperous society. The EU has taken note of allegations that there were procedural violations in the 24 December court hearing, and that representatives of the magazine were not present in court when the closure order was made. We will continue to follow this case.

In Belarus, new amendments to the law on mass media, as well as the recent blockings of a number of news portals, pose a serious threat to media freedom and freedom of expression, including online. Full enjoyment of these rights is also important in the context of the forthcoming presidential elections in November.

In the context of wider concerns about media freedom in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the European Union is also closely following the court case related to Tomislav Kezarovski.

Finally, we welcome the move towards greater internet access across Turkmenistan set out in a new Internet law adopted in December. At the same time we call on the authorities to address the concerns raised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that the law contains restrictive regulations which may limit free expression.

The European Union commends the RFOM for her ongoing engagement on these and other issues of concern. We encourage our partners that we have addressed in this statement to fully engage with her to ensure full compliance and implementation of our shared international obligations and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression. We welcome the broad support that exists among participating States, as demonstrated in Basel, for a decision on freedom of expression, and encourage the Serbian Chairmanship to take this issue forward this year.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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