



EUROPEAN UNION

Skopje, 2 October 2015

**EU-funded Regional project: Media Observatory
Round table: Countering Hate Speech and Discrimination
through the Media - Editors' Influence and Challenges**

(EU InfoCentre)

Speaking points
Ambassador Aivo Orav
Head of the EU Delegation

Dear Ms Nikodinovska,

Dear Ms Tuneva,

Distinguished experts and media professionals,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Freedom of expression is one of the fundamental values of the European Union. It is a human right safeguarded by international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

Last year, the Council of the European Union issued the Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline. These guidelines are not mere statements of intent. They also represent clear policy commitments to enhance and protect freedom of opinion and expression worldwide. The guidelines also clarify that freedom of speech must not allow *"any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence"*.

Words are powerful. They can inspire noble actions, but as we have witnessed throughout history, words and hate speech can also provoke devastating actions.

With this in mind, it is a great responsibility for journalists and media outlets to always offer balanced information based on facts. Without freedom of expression and professional

journalism, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.

States also play crucial role by ensuring that journalists work in a free and safe environment, without fear of censorship or restraint. Defamation laws should not be misused to censor criticism and public debate. States also have the obligation to respect the right to free opinion and free expression since freedom of expression **is an essential part of the Copenhagen political criteria for accession to the European Union**. And those messages are particularly applicable in this country.

The European Union monitors and offers guidance on persisting media freedom issues through pre-accession political dialogue and annual progress reports. Particular attention is paid to fighting impunity in cases of violence against journalists, creating a transparent market basis for the media sector and developing the judiciary as a guarantor for individual rights.

The EU assists addressing of these issues also through its financial instruments. Under the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, **2.5 million EUR** have been allocated for actions supporting media freedom and integrity. Under IPA II specific help will be provided to ensure the strengthening of journalists' professional organisations and NGOs committed to media freedom.

At the end, I would like to emphasise that tolerance and respect of dignity of all human beings constitute the foundations of a democratic society. Therefore, continuous work on promotion of diversity and inclusiveness, both by all stakeholders and media outlets, are crucial in countering hate speech. Let me once again express our support to **the Council of Media Ethics**, where cases of hate speech could be reported and dealt with. At the same time let me call for a multi-stakeholder's dialogue as crucial response to the hate speech in the country.

Finally, I would also like to extend gratitude to our partners from the *Macedonian Institute for Media* for organising this roundtable and for their successful participation in the EU-regional project 'South East Europe Media Observatory'.

Thank you.