



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 7 April 2016

**Follow up on the Speak up Conference  
EU support to freedom of expression and freedom of media  
(Hotel Aleksandar Palace)**

Speaking points  
Ambassador Aivo Orav  
Head of the EU Delegation

***Distinguished experts and media professionals,***

***Dear colleagues,***

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

A sincere commitment to promoting democracy and respecting human rights is expected from every country that aspires to join the European Union.

**Freedom of expression** - the reason why we have gathered here today - **is a fundamental human right.**

Unfortunately, the situation here is not good. Our past reports have clearly stated that the **freedom of expression and the media environment remains a serious challenge.**

The **challenges** include lack of balanced and fair reporting. There is self-censorship of journalists. Journalists do not have fully ensured access to public information. The independence of the regulatory body is not respected. Financing of media is not sufficiently transparent and in the case of the public broadcaster not adequate. The community of journalists is divided instead of jointly defending its own interests. Sadly, one can also hear hate speech in your media without any follow up by the state institutions.

This **needs to change.** Since, absence of pluralistic content in media deprives citizens of the right to reliable information. This, in turn, undermines democracy and the effectiveness of institutions. Public trust in the media diminishes, along with their ability to act as a public watchdog holding power to account.

In principle, politicians should guarantee a safe environment where different opinion can be expressed. State authorities need to fully investigate cases of violence against journalists, and the judiciary should guarantee the freedom of expression.

At the same time, **media themselves have an important responsibility.** They need to live up to professional standards. All major outlets have signed Media Ethics Council's Charter on Reporting for Elections. Regrettably, the Council has reported weak compliance thus far. There have been only some examples of self-criticism in very few media outlets. This needs to continue and others should be inspired by these efforts.

Finally, it is very important that ethical principles apply not only during elections, but they serve as guidelines in media's everyday work.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

The EU continues **to support the media reforms** in the country. At today's follow up of the Speak Up conference, we are promoting recently awarded grants to seven civil society organisations, which total to almost two million EUR. We also promote a supply-contract for the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, which is providing new equipment worth 800,000 EUR to the Agency headquarters and regional centres.

These projects aim to contribute to improving the situation with the freedom of expression.

At the end, let me say that the EU is aware that **living up to European standards in the media field is a challenge** for most enlargement countries. But the alternative is a weakened process of state building, without democratic control, with limited scrutiny of corruption and public opinion dangerously exposed to misinformation. And, as Commissioner Hahn said at the Speak up conference, 'citizens need quality journalism to nourish their critical thinking - this is what being a European is all about!'

Thank you for your attention. I wish you a good debate.