

Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, on behalf of the EU on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2017

Free press is vital for having a democracy that works. Today we celebrate the **World Press Freedom Day** in a difficult context for journalism. Freedom of expression and Freedom of the press are under increasing attacks around the world.

Free, diverse and independent media are indispensable to promoting and protecting democracy worldwide. A free press and freedom of expression are among the very same foundations of democracy, contribute to stable, inclusive, and resilient societies and can help defuse tensions and contain conflicts. The EU supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes ensuring universal access to information and protection of freedom of expression.

Supporting independent, quality and ethical journalism is essential. By facilitating the free flow of quality and well-researched information on matters of public interest, and by acting as the “public’s watchdog”, independent media are the basis of a participatory democracy and a tool to make governments accountable for their actions. The EU ensures that respect for freedom of expression is integrated in all EU policies and development programmes. The EU is notably funding specific projects in third countries enhancing quality of journalism, access to public information and freedom of expression. Since June 2015, the EU has supported at least 45 endangered Human Rights Defenders that promote the right of freedom of expression under its small grant scheme.

The EU condemns the increase of threats and violations against journalists and media professional offline and in cyberspace. All states are expected to fulfil their global obligations to protect freedom of expression and the safety of journalists by providing a supportive legal environment and prosecuting all attacks against journalists. The EU consistently opposes - in bilateral contacts with third countries as well as in multilateral and regional fora - any legislation, regulation or political pressure that limits freedom of expression and takes concrete steps to prevent and respond to attacks against journalists and bloggers.

The EU Guidelines on Freedom of expression online and offline, adopted in 2014, and their continued implementation, reaffirm the EU's determination to promote freedom of opinion and of expression as rights to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality, through any media and regardless of frontiers.