



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on recent developments in the Russian Federation regarding Media Freedom

The EU is deeply concerned with the recent developments in the Russian Federation regarding media freedom. As reported by the Representative on Freedom of the Media in his statement of 29 July, at least 15 journalists were assaulted, detained or had their equipment damaged by police while covering the demonstration in Moscow on 27 July. Fourteen journalists were also detained on 3 August.

In this regard, the EU remains concerned for the overall safety of journalists in the Russian Federation, with reports of continued incidents of intimidation, threats and violence, including the recent decision to charge RFE/RL journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva with “justifying terrorism,” risking seven years in prison. This and other questionable criminal cases against journalists for voicing their opinions in Russia put serious pressure on freedom of the media in Russia. Under the current threat of imprisonment, journalists may hesitate to speak the truth in a timely fashion. In the context of safety of journalists, we must not forget the Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya who was killed 13 years ago and we echo the repeated calls by the RFoM on Russian authorities to intensify their efforts to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists.

In Milan 2018, all pS agreed to condemn publicly and unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists such as intimidation, harassment, and threats of all forms, including legal, political, technological or economic, used to suppress their work and/or unduly force closure of their offices.

An additional threat to free and independent media and to access to information and yet another example of shrinking space for independent voices in Russia are the recent suggestions made by the Russian State Duma's Commission for investigating intervention in Russia's internal affairs. The Commission has asked the Ministry of Justice to consider adding Deutsche Welle to the list of “Foreign agent” media outlets, to revoke DW's accreditation, and to review Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the BBC, Meduza, and other foreign outlets for their coverage of this summer's events. We have raised our concerns over Russia's “foreign agent” legislation many times, which goes against Russia's human rights obligations and OSCE commitments.

As mentioned also in many statements, with the latest on March 28 this year, we are concerned with the growing number of legislative measures, such as the law on extremism and the newly adopted set of laws on “disrespect” to the state and the spread of what is vaguely described as deliberately untrue information and a sovereign Internet that curb a free and open debate, at a time when public scrutiny of government actions is more needed than ever, as well as the right to receive and express opinion which is fundamental to any democratic society. The aforementioned laws impose excessive restrictions on speech and information on the Internet, and could further limit media freedom in the country.

In this regard we also recall that in Helsinki 1975, participating States made it their aim to encourage co-operation in the field of information and the exchange of information with other countries, and to improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State exercise their profession in another participating State. We also recall the Istanbul Document from 1999, where we committed ourselves to take all necessary steps to ensure the basic conditions for free and independent media and unimpeded transborder and intra-State flow of information, which we highlighted to be an essential component of any democratic, free and open society.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA* and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA and CANADA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.