



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**The Representative on Freedom of the Media**  
**Harlem Désir**

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## **Regular Report to the Permanent Council** *for the period from 9 November 2017 to 5 July 2018*

### **Introduction**

Monsieur le Président,  
Mesdames et messieurs les Ambassadeurs,

C'est un honneur pour moi de présenter aujourd'hui devant vous mon deuxième rapport au Conseil Permanent presque un an, jour pour jour, après avoir été nommé Représentant pour la Liberté des Médias de l'OSCE.

Je veux aujourd'hui, devant vous, tirer un signal d'alarme face à la gravité et à la détérioration de la situation de la liberté des médias à laquelle nous avons assisté au cours de la dernière période.

Au cours de cette année, les emprisonnements de journalistes se sont poursuivis, de nouveaux journaux ont été interdits, davantage de sites d'information en ligne ont été bloqués, les restrictions d'accès à l'Internet se sont multipliées, les attaques contre les journalistes ont continué et des journalistes ont été assassinés, en plus grand nombre encore.

Il y a une semaine aux Etats-Unis, Gerald Fischman, Robert Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith et Wendi Winters – quatre journalistes et une membre de l'équipe du quotidien Capital Gazette à Annapolis, Maryland, un des plus anciens journaux des Etats-Unis, étaient tués au travail, dans les locaux du journal. Tués pour avoir fait leur travail.

Leurs noms sont venus s'ajouter à ceux de Daphne Caruana Galizia assassinée à Malte, de Jan Kuciak abattu en Slovaquie avec sa fiancée, de Kim Wall, journaliste suédoise tuée au Danemark, de Halla Barakat et de sa mère Ourouba Barakat, syriennes, tuées en Turquie et Zachary Stoner tué par balles aux Etats-Unis.

On pourrait y ajouter la mort mystérieuse de Maxim Borodin, journaliste d'investigation tombé du 5<sup>ème</sup> étage de son immeuble à Iekaterinbourg, mort sur laquelle j'ai demandé qu'une enquête approfondie puisse être menée.

Tous, toutes, ont disparu brutalement au cours de l'année écoulée. Une année où l'impensable est devenu plus banal pour les salles de rédaction, et nous ne pouvons pas l'accepter. Etre journaliste aujourd'hui est devenu l'un des métiers les plus dangereux du monde. Non pas

être reporter de guerre ou couvrir les conflits armés. Non, le simple fait d'être journaliste, d'enquêter, de publier, de commenter sur les questions d'intérêt public, des sujets politiques, économiques, de sécurité, de corruption, ou même d'être un dessinateur de presse, un caricaturiste, est devenu un risque.

Et la presse est plus exposée que jamais dans un climat trop souvent marqué par des attaques permanentes, une mise en cause systématique, des campagnes de menaces et de haine répétées contre les journalistes. L'un des symptômes de ce climat ce sont les publications, que l'on voit fleurir, de listes de journalistes désignés à la vindicte.

Ce climat est dangereux.

Il dégrade la qualité du débat public, il affaiblit le rôle de contrôle et d'information de la presse. Il accroît les risques pour la sécurité des journalistes.

La presse est une institution fragile de la démocratie, plus encore quand soufflent les vents de l'extrémisme, du populisme et de la violence, attisés sur les réseaux sociaux à l'abri de comptes anonymes ou par des groupes fanatiques.

Beaucoup de journalistes sont explicitement et individuellement visés, en particulier les journalistes d'investigation, mais pas seulement eux. Les femmes journalistes sont l'objet d'un harcèlement odieux et des menaces les plus lâches.

Dans la plupart des cas où des journalistes ont été tués, ils avaient reçu des menaces auparavant.

Je demande aujourd'hui aux Etats Participants de traiter les menaces de mort contre les journalistes, y compris celles adressées par internet, avec la plus extrême vigilance pour qu'elles fassent l'objet d'enquêtes systématiques, que leurs auteurs soient identifiés, poursuivis et condamnés avec la plus grande fermeté.

L'impunité reste trop souvent la seule conséquence des menaces et des attaques contre les journalistes, y compris pour les assassinats.

Chaque fois que l'impunité s'installe c'est une défaite de la démocratie et c'est une victoire pour ceux qui veulent intimider ou museler la presse.

La lutte contre l'impunité doit être une priorité des Etats et les coopérations internationales doivent se développer autant que nécessaire pour arrêter les criminels qui s'en prennent aux journalistes.

J'ai vu le courage des journalistes attaqués, le courage d'Olivera Lakic au Monténégro après qu'elle ait été atteinte d'une balle dans la jambe devant chez elle, celui des fils de Daphne Caruana Galizia, celui des collègues et amis de Jan Kuciak. Nous voyons tous les hommages magnifiques aux cinq morts de Capital Gazette à Annapolis et la détermination de leurs collègues à poursuivre leur travail au service de la communauté de la ville.

Mais le courage des journalistes ne suffit pas. La responsabilité des Etats c'est de protéger la presse dans ce moment où les risques sont élevés.

La presse est une institution indispensable mais vulnérable de la démocratie. Elle n'est pas une institution dans l'Etat. Elle est composée de centaines voire de milliers d'acteurs divers et indépendants dans chaque pays, et cela est sa nature même.

C'est pourquoi elle est fragile et doit être défendue comme un bien commun de la société.

C'est le sens des engagements pris par les Etats participants à l'OSCE concernant la liberté des médias.

Les Etats ne se sont pas engagés à protéger la liberté des médias, ou la sécurité des journalistes, parce que les médias leur sont favorables mais en raison de leur rôle irremplaçable pour la société et pour la vie démocratique. Et parce qu'il a été reconnu, au sein de l'OSCE, que la liberté des médias est un élément essentiel de notre sécurité collective.

Chaque fois qu'un journaliste est attaqué c'est l'accès à l'information, c'est la liberté d'expression, c'est la démocratie elles-mêmes qui sont attaquées.

Dans ce climat d'hostilité envers les médias, nous voyons la tentation de certains dirigeants de se prévaloir de la légitimité populaire majoritaire pour remettre en cause la légitimité de la presse et contester son rôle critique.

Mais c'est la nature même de la presse que d'être critique envers tous les pouvoirs, quels qu'ils soient. C'est la condition même d'un débat ouvert, pluraliste et informé dans la société et de gouvernements qui répondent devant les citoyens. La presse agace les gouvernements mais elle aide à un meilleur gouvernement.

One may criticize, one may disagree, one may even dislike the media - but it is the obligation of a democracy to accept, to respect and to protect the diversity and freedom of all voices.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This second report, that I have the honour to present here at the Permanent Council, clearly reflects the situation and the problems faced by the media in the OSCE region.

Since my last report in November last year I have made 273 interventions, 371 in total in 40 participating States in the year I have been Representative.

From threats and intimidation to attacks, arson, and physical violence including murder, most of my interventions have been on the safety of journalists.

This is my number one priority and should also be the first concern for participating States when it comes to media freedom.

In addition to physical safety, online safety of journalists, particularly for female journalists, who are targeted with horrific abuse and harassment, is a major concern.

Under the auspices of the Safety of Female Journalists Online project (known as SOFJO), my Office is currently working on a large scale research project to identify solutions and collect data on policies that better protect journalists. We are also working on a full length

documentary to show, through the lives of journalists living and working in the OSCE region, the horrific scope and scale of online harassment. The documentary will be screened this December, here in Vienna.

I will continue to call out threats, abuse and harassment of the media wherever and whenever they occur.

Safety also featured prominently on the agenda of the many conferences held by my Office over the past year.

At many of our events, the deterioration of journalists' safety was answered with initiatives to promote solidarity within the media community and I would underline two important examples: the declaration adopted at the South East Europe Conference in Struga in May, where more than 200 participants came together to call for State authorities to do more to protect journalists following the shooting of Olivera Lakić and the joint statement from the Russian and Ukrainian Unions of Journalists when they gathered in Vienna in February calling for the release of Stanislav Aseev.

In what has become a declining safety environment for media workers, solidarity is a duty for all – which is also why I travelled, whenever possible, to personally speak with journalists who have been the target of attacks; families who have lost their loved ones, outlets whose colleagues paid the ultimate price for journalism.

Safety of journalists also refers to legal safety – the ability to report without fear of legal repercussions, the foremost of which is imprisonment for journalistic work. This is the second largest issue on which I intervene. Today, in the OSCE region, more than 150 journalists are still in prison. Reporting, even on sensitive issues, expressing critical views, even on governmental policies, investigating, even on corruption cases, should not lead to the imprisonment of a journalist.

The fight against terrorism, violent extremism and hate speech should also not result in jailing of journalists who have nothing to do with such criminal activities. It is on the contrary more necessary than ever to demonstrate that when can combat these evils without renouncing our core values and to the international commitments to protect fundamental freedoms.

I have been and will continue to highlight each case of imprisonment, calling on authorities to dismiss charges and respect the independence and work of the media, until each journalist unjustly imprisoned can be released. Several of them have been released during this year, and I welcomed it with great relief each time. It shows that it is possible and I will offer the unconditional assistance of my Office to Participating States in this effort.

There is another crucial area where bad definitions or misused of legislation on security, terrorism or extremism can affect media freedom - the regulation of the Internet.

I have intervened in many cases involving disproportionate restriction to media freedom and freedom of expression.

At a time when freedom of media and expression are increasingly exercised online, States must ensure that the internet remains a space for pluralistic debate and information rather than a tool for censorship and repression.

From blocking of website to surveillance and forced disclosure of confidential sources, security is too often used for sweeping restrictions on freedom of expression online.

This was one of the main points we raised in the Joint Declaration I issued this year together with the media freedom mandate holders of the UN, the OAS, and the African Commission on Human Rights: ("*restrictions on freedom of expression which rely on notions such as "national security", the "fight against terrorism", "extremism" or "incitement to hatred" should be defined clearly and narrowly and be subject to judicial oversight.*")

I will continue to stress that human rights and security must be seen as mutually reinforcing and States must do more to ensure that this is reflected in their laws, policies and practices. There is a lot at stake here for the future of the media.

Digitalization is the inevitable future of information. We don't know what the next development will be. What we do know is that tremendous change is coming, with many opportunities for new media but also new possibilities for manipulation of information, and difficulties for legacy media.

If we believe in the irreplaceable role of journalism, with its professional standards more necessary than ever at the age of fake news and viral rumors, we must avoid that the information sphere is caught between political censorship and algorithms creating information bubbles driven by artificial intelligence. We need the States to cooperate at international level, with civil society and internet actors to ensure an open internet, with net neutrality and no undue restriction which will maintain a level playing field for the development of media pluralism, journalism and quality information.

We must at the same time promote more media literacy initiatives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also want to underline that during this year, we often engaged constructively with the participating States through exchanges, projects and actions to support and make progress in the respect of freedom of expression and of media freedom, in many different domains.

First, we have provided assistance to a number of participating States by conducting expert legal reviews and analysis. Throughout my year in Office we have conducted 14 such reviews in 12 participating States and regions.

In the period covered by this report, we analyzed laws and provided advice (on audio-visual media services, defamation, dissemination of extremist material and propaganda, internet regulation, television and radio broadcasting, extradition via INTERPOL, and the regulation of hate speech) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

Strengthening professional and ethical standards in journalism is also a key dimension of the work we do together with a number of journalists' unions and press councils, including through our Cyprus Dialogue project.

(And I will be in Cyprus next week to again meet with the participants of this innovative initiative and to launch a glossary that will address a challenge that faces journalists in many parts of the OSCE region – to report professionally on complex situations.)

During this reporting period, my Office also organized 4 conferences, from Kiev to Struga, Nicosia to Vienna, to provide a platform for crucial discussions for nearly 1,000 representatives of government, civil society, academia, and the media community on strengthening media freedom.

Official visits to participating States are also an unparalleled opportunity to deepen cooperation and build relationships with authorities, civil society and local media communities.

During the first year of my mandate, I was able to visit 28 participating States, some several times. My sincere thanks go out to the Ambassadors and their able delegations for the support provided to me and my Office during these trips.

I would especially like to highlight my engagement at the highest level with five of the countries in the South East Europe region. These visits enriched my cooperation with governments, the media community and resulted in progress on a number of issues including steps to reform public broadcasting, strengthen regulatory agencies, develop a media strategy in Serbia, and support media self-regulation.

Here I must express my gratitude to the OSCE field operations in the region that, not only facilitate and follow-up on my visits, but also provided an invaluable contribution to this year's South East Europe Media Conference and serve as a crucial resource for my Office and national authorities. I also extend this gratitude to the mission in Central Asia, in particular Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for their support during my visits and organization of conferences.

There is no greater satisfaction for me and my team than seeing our work with you, the participating States, result in real change for journalists, such as the repeal of problematic laws, improvements in dialogue and to working conditions and, of course, the release of a journalist from prison. In my first year I welcomed the release of 14 journalists whose cases I regularly raised previously with authorities. I wish that there were more and will work with you relentlessly for this to happen.

Throughout my year as Representative, at each event and during every visit, I have been deeply impressed and moved by the unrelenting spirit of journalists.

Only a few hours after the horrendous attack on the Capital Gazette, reporter Chase Cook took to Twitter to proclaim : “ I can tell you this: we are putting out a damn paper tomorrow”.

And they did.

Despite the numerous obstacles and threats posed on a daily basis, journalists refuse to surrender and courageously perform the essential tasks of democracy – asking tough questions, boldly pursuing stories and speaking truth to the public.

I call on you and your governments to stand by our media and fully honor the commitments you have made to protect freedom of expression and media freedom.

Thank you very much.

## **Issues raised with participating States**

### **Albania**

On **12 - 13 February** I paid an official visit to Albania and met with Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Media Committee and members from the media community in **Tirana**. We had in-depth discussions on promoting a strong and pluralist media landscape, respect for the independence of journalists, the protection of the economic and social status of journalists, the reform of the public service broadcaster RTSH, and the contribution of my Office to issues of online regulation and state aid to media as well as the South East Europe Media Conference, to take place in May.

During meetings I emphasized that the economic status of journalists is one of the most pressing issues, recalling to the need to respect their labor rights. In addition, I welcomed the positive developments that RTSH has achieved, adding that it will need strong financial support to successfully reform.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities to present a legal review and recommendations regarding the regulation of online content in South East Europe. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies.

(see Legal reviews)

On **14 June** I issued a public statement related to the proposed amendments to Albania's Law on Audio- Visual Media expressing concern that it could affect the financial sustainability of the public service broadcaster (RTSH). Any state subsidies to media must be subject to a public consultation that includes all media stakeholders and must have a clear and broad objective to support all media sectors, including online, print and local press, with transparent criteria and procedures, no political interference and with the overall objective of strengthening media plurality.

### **Armenia**

On **6 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern regarding reports of death threats against Marianna Grigorian, Editor of Medialab.am. I noted that an investigation into the case had recently begun and expressed my hope that it would be swift and that the perpetrator would be brought to justice.

On **23 April** I wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian expressing concern about reports of violence and excessive use of force against media workers covering public protests. Reportedly, a number of journalists and media outlets were affected, attacked and targeted, including by police officers.

On 18 May I received a reply from the authorities with an update on the actions taken by the law enforcement authorities to address the incidents involving journalists.

### **Azerbaijan**

On **30 November** I wrote to the authorities to express my concern about several developments involving journalists Aziz Orudjev, Afghan Mukhtarli and Khadija Ismayilova (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **18 December** I issued a public statement regarding journalists Aziz Orudjev, Afghan Mukhtarli and Khadija Ismayilova. Aziz Orudjev, head of internet TV channel Kanal 13, was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of power. I called on the authorities to review the verdict in Orudjev's case and to end restrictive measures detrimental to his freedom and safety.

I raised my concern regarding the ongoing trial of journalist Afghan Mukhtarli, who was reportedly abducted in Tbilisi, Georgia at the end of May 2017. I urged the authorities to drop all charges against the journalist and respect his right to freedom of expression (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

I noted reports that the bank accounts of well-known investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova had been suspended. I reminded the authorities that this restrictive action, together with Ismayilova's previous imprisonment and continued travel ban, is yet another obstacle seriously hindering the professional activity of the journalist.

Furthermore, I expressed disappointment with the court's decision to uphold the two-year prison sentence handed down to Mehman Huseynov, blogger and chair of the media NGO, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, on 15 December 2017 (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 March 2017).

On 30 January I learned that Ismayilova's appeal to lift the travel ban was dismissed by the court.

On **22 December** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern about the continued state blocking of several online media platforms after the Baku appeals court upheld a district court decision from 12 May 2017 ordering the blocking of the websites of newspaper Azadliq (azadliq.info), the Azerbaijan service of RFE/RL (azadliq.org), as well as the news portals Azerbaijan Saati (azerbaycansaati.com and azerbaycansaati.tv), Meydan TV (meydan.tv) and Turan TV (kanalturan.com) given their alleged threat to the security and interests of the state and society.

I said that blocking any website is an extreme measure which can only be justified in accordance with international standards, based on clear, precise and non-discriminatory criteria.



On 4 June I learned that the blocking was also upheld by the Supreme Court.

On **12 January** I issued a public statement condemning the sentencing of journalist Afgan Mukhtarli to six years in prison on charges of "smuggling", "illegal crossing of the border" and "resistance to an official representative". I expressed my hope that the verdict be overturned on appeal.

On **6 February** I wrote to the authorities requesting that imprisoned journalist Afgan Mukhtarli be allowed to join his family on the occasion of the remembrance ceremony of his sister and two nieces, who tragically died in December 2017. I also expressed concern about the journalist's serious health problems given the very limited professional medical care and treatment he has received.

On 8 February I was informed by the authorities that Mukhtarli was granted permitted to attend the ceremony with his family. I thanked the authorities.

On **2 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted the court proceedings in Khadija Ismayilova's case on tax evasion charges and expressed hope that the journalist would not face another restriction on professional activity.

On **6 April** I issued a public statement welcoming the release of Aziz Orudjev, head of internet TV channel Kanal 13. The Supreme Court changed the term of journalist's punishment from six years imprisonment to a suspended sentence of three years' probation period, and ordered his release from custody.

On **25 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I reiterated my call to the authorities to drop all charges against the journalist Afgan Mukhtarli, following the appeal court's decision to uphold his prison sentence.

On **13 June** I wrote to the authorities raising the case of Rafiq Jalilov, the Editor-in-chief of the "Talyshon Sado", a local newspaper based in Sumgait. Reportedly, on 12 June Jalilov was detained at a police station. Although Jalilov and his relatives were later released, the police seized nearly one hundred copies of the newspaper's recent two editions. I urged the authorities to clarify the reasons and legal basis for such restrictive measures taken against the journalist and with regards to the seizure of the newspaper.

## **Belarus**

On **21 November** I wrote to the authorities regarding the detention of Pavlo Sharoiko, a correspondent for the Ukrainian national radio in Belarus. According to reports, on 25 October Sharoiko was detained by law enforcement officers in Minsk on charges of espionage.

I called on the authorities to duly investigate the case and requested additional information.

On 24 May I learned that Sharoiko was sentenced to at least eight years in prison.

On **29 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that journalists in the country continue to face prosecution for working with foreign media without state

accreditation. I emphasized that excessive restrictions on the activities of foreign media must be lifted and expressed the readiness of my Office to assist in this regard.

On **21 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted the start of the trial against Dmitriy Alimkin, Yuriy Pavlovets and Sergey Shiptenko, who have been held in detention since December 2016 on criminal charges of “inciting racial, national or religious discord” based on their contributions to Russian media. I reiterated my request that authorities carefully review the case and fully respect the right to freedom of expression in line with OSCE commitments (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 March 2017).

On 2 February I learned that all three were found guilty by the court, receiving sentences of five years imprisonment. The prison term was later replaced with a three-year suspended sentence, and they were released from custody.

On 14 June the Supreme Court upheld the 2 February judicial decision.

On **26 January**, following the blocking of news website Charter97.org, I issued a public statement calling on the authorities to ensure unrestricted access to the Internet. The blocking came about following an order from the Ministry of Information claiming website materials allegedly violated national interests. I also noted that this blocking came shortly after a similar situation in which officials blocked access to the website, Belaruspartisan.org in December 2017.

I said that the repeated blocking of access to websites is detrimental in that it prevents access to information and infringes on media freedom. OSCE commitments do not allow for broadly defined “national interests” to restrict the exercise of the fundamental human right to access information (see Report to the Permanent Council of 18 June 2015).

On **19 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about the case of Belsat TV’s cameraman Andrus Kozel, who was allegedly beaten by police at a polling station. I stressed that attacks on journalists must be thoroughly investigated, noting that media must be allowed to provide invaluable information during elections.

On **2 May** I wrote to the authorities conveying concern about the detention of Dzmitry Halko, a journalist contributing to various Belarusian and foreign media outlets, including *The Times* magazine. Reportedly, Halko was detained on 22 April 2018 in the Stolín district of Brest oblast, when crossing the border into Belarus from the Ukrainian city of Lviv, based on criminal charges of using violence against police officers.

I urged the authorities to determine whether the charges are related to Halko’s professional activity as a journalist and, if so, to release him as soon as possible.

On 31 May I received an official reply indicating that Halko’s detention is the result of criminal activity and not related to his work as a journalist.

On **8 May** I issued a public statement regarding the on-going practice of imposing penalties on journalists working without accreditation following fines imposed on six journalists for contributing to Poland-based Belsat TV.

I said that such practices effectively prevent journalists from reporting on issues of public interest and have a crippling effect on pluralism and freedom of the media in the country. I urged authorities to urgently amend the mass media law and grant all journalists the unimpeded right to seek and disseminate information.

According to available reports, there have been more than 40 instances of freelance journalists being fined for working without accreditation in 2018 alone (see Report to the Permanent Council of 10 March 2016, 18 June 2015 and 19 June 2014).

On **22 May** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern about the violent attack on Syarhey Chaly, an online talk show presenter with the news website TUT.BY. Chaly was attacked and beaten along with one of his friends by a group of unknown persons on 19 May in the center of Minsk. He was hospitalised.

I condemned the attack and urged the authorities to speedily and effectively investigate the case.

On **18 June** I issued a public statement expressing concern about the adoption of legislative amendments which further restrict media activities in the country. The amendments affect the work of national mass media, internet resources, and foreign media outlets.

Among other things, the amendments to the law “On the mass media” include a general ban on foreigners, foreign legal entities, Belarusian entities with at least 20 percent stock belonging to foreign or international entities, and stateless persons establishing media outlets in the country. The amendments provide the Ministry of Information with strict control over all online resources, oblige the owners of online resources to “analyse” all content, as the law demands that they are responsible for preventing the dissemination of untruthful information that may harm State or public interest, or defame individuals or legal entities and make the owners of online resources liable if their resources are used to disseminate information or comments by internet users who have not gone through prior identification, as defined by the State.

I said that many of the provisions are excessive and disproportionate and called on the authorities to carefully review the law and bring it in line with international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

### **Belgium**

On **20 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted my concern about the detention of journalists from the public broadcaster RTBF who were covering demonstrations. I stated that journalists must be free to report on all issues.

On the following day I learned that the journalists were released after two hours of administrative arrest.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

On **5 December** I issued a public statement calling on the authorities of Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina to investigate numerous death threats against journalists and ensure their safety. Threats followed media reports on the same story.

Journalists from Croatia's Index.hr portal received a number of very serious insults and death threats on social media, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, journalists Sanel Kajan and Štefica Galić from Al Jazeera and the tacno.net portal respectively, were targeted with numerous threats on social networks, including threats of death and rape.

On **22 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned a physical attack against Nedžad Latić, Editor of The Bosnia Times in Sarajevo, calling on authorities to conduct a swift investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

On **23 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the fact that police in Sarajevo detained a suspect following the attack on Nedžad Latić.

On **18 - 20 April** I conducted an official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina where I met with Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak, Minister of Human Rights and Refugees Semiha Borovac, Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, Borislav Bojić, and Deputy Minister for Transport and Communications Saša Dalipagić as well as various media actors in **Sarajevo**. The main discussions focused on the issues of safety of journalists, transparency of media ownership, working conditions for journalists and the state of the public service broadcasting system as well as the upcoming South East Europe Media Conference in May.

Throughout my visit, special focus was put on the issue of safety of journalists. I also emphasized that the political independence and financial sustainability of state and entity broadcasters is of critical importance and urgently needed.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities to present a legal review and recommendations regarding the regulation of online content in South East Europe. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies.

(see Legal reviews)

## **Bulgaria**

On **27 November** I issued a public statement calling on the authorities to take urgent measures to protect journalists and the publisher of the regional news website Zov News, Georgi Ezekiev, who received death threats from members of an alleged criminal organisation. I also referred to Maria Dimitrova, who works for the same outlet and was repeatedly threatened following her investigative work.

On **7 February** I wrote to the authorities requesting information on the reasons for the seizure of property belonging to the publisher of the Economedia conglomerate, Ivo Prokopiev by a Burgas court order. Economedia is the publisher of media outlets Kapital and Dnevnik, whose existence may be threatened by the court decision.

On **19 April** I received a reply to my letter of 7 February informing me that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs forwarded the letter to the relevant authorities with a request for clarification.

On **14 May** I wrote to the authorities and issued a public statement raising concern over the assault of Khristo Geshov, a TV journalist from Cherven Bryag, who exposed corruption by municipal authorities and was attacked in front of his house on 10 May.

On **14 May** in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern about the attack on Khristo Goshev and called on the authorities to swiftly investigate the incident.

## **Canada**

On **1 March** I issued a press statement following an official visit to Canada. During the visit I met with representatives of Global Affairs Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage, Justice Canada, Public Safety Canada, the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). I underlined that Canada has a strong record of protecting freedom of expression and media freedom – both at home and abroad. I also discussed a number of media freedom issues including protection of sources of journalists, access to information, law on defamation and current challenges concerning the dissemination of “fake news” and disinformation online, Internet regulation on broader issues, harmful speech and media pluralism. I noted that improvements are possible in several areas, and encouraged the Canadian authorities to ensure that the recently amended law on the protection of journalistic sources will offer all journalists protection in line with international human rights standards.

I also took part in the Global Internet Jurisdiction Conference, which gathered representatives from governments, international organizations, Internet companies and experts to develop policy solutions to the challenges of Internet governance and regulation. I recommended that an inclusive, transparent, multi-stakeholder approach to Internet governance and policy development is necessary, and must be reinforced.

## **Croatia**

On **5 December** I issued a public statement calling on the authorities of Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina to investigate numerous death threats against journalists and ensure their safety. Threats followed media reports on the same news story.

Journalists from Croatia’s Index.hr portal received a number of very serious insults and death threats on social media, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, journalists Sanel Kajan and Štefica Galić from Al Jazeera and the tacno.net portal respectively, were targeted with numerous threats on social networks, including threats of death and rape.

On **18 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I joined the Croatian Journalists` Association in welcoming Prime Minister Andrej Plenković’s statement that frequent threats against journalists are unacceptable and dangerous for media freedom.

On **11 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the sentencing of the three perpetrators responsible for beating Željko Peratović in 2015, to a total of seven years and six months in prison.

On **6 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed a court decision to sentence the perpetrators of physical attacks and threats against Nova TV journalist Ema Branica and crew Alan Novak and Goran Jaganjac in September 2017.

On **12 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I highlighted two important court decisions in Croatia in favor of Croatian Journalists' Association President Saša Leković, namely the conviction and sentencing for the sending of death threats to the journalist in 2016 and the rejection of appeal regarding the first-instance defamation lawsuit against Leković for reporting on the so called "Offshore Leaks".

On **25 June** I issued a public statement condemning the brutal beating of and death threats against journalist Hrvoje Bajlo in Zadar. The journalist was hospitalized as a result of the attack.

I welcomed the prompt reaction by Croatian authorities who have detained the accused perpetrator and expressed my hope that the incident would be properly sanctioned.

## **Cyprus**

On **16 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about threats to Turkish Cypriot daily newspaper Afrika. I emphasized that freedom of expression must be respected, and joined in on the message of support to the newspaper by the Turkish Cypriot Journalist Union Basin Sen, and by the Union of Cyprus Journalists ESK.

On 24 January I received a letter from Alexandros N. Zenon, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, drawing attention to an attack on the premises of the Turkish Cypriot daily Afrika on 21 January. The letter emphasized that the Government took immediate action, informing the United Nations and several Ambassadors of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The letter urged me to consider all appropriate measures in my mandate to protect media freedom and safety of journalists on the island.

On **25 January** I issued a public statement condemning the vandalising of the Nicosia premises of the daily Afrika on 22 January. The previous day, on 21 January, in a public speech, Turkish authorities called for "appropriate action" against the newspaper following publication of an allegedly impertinent headline for a story on Turkey's military action in Afrin, Syria.

I noted that attempts to intimidate journalists are unacceptable and that journalists must be able to work without fear. I also noted that the Cyprus Journalists' Union, Basin-Sen/Press Workers' Union, and the Turkish Cypriot Journalists' Union condemned the attack.

On **23 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision to hand down prison sentences to the perpetrators in the attack on the Afrika offices.

On **26 and 27 February** I expressed my concern, in a letter to Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides and a public statement about a recent court decision in Cyprus to prohibit a daily newspaper from publishing articles on leaked emails between the State Attorney and

Russian officials. I also noted my concern about the fact that several journalists from two daily newspapers were questioned by police.

On 10 January a Nicosia district court ruled in favour of an injunction request by the State Attorney against the daily newspaper Politis, following its publication of parts of her leaked e-mails. In the month that followed, several journalists from Politis and from the media outlet Phileleftheros, which made references to the case, were questioned by the police. Police also demanded that Phileleftheros remove any articles they deemed offensive in relation to this case.

I welcomed President Nicos Anastasiades' emphasis on the need to protect journalistic work, and recalled that, as outlined by the European Court of Human Rights, news is a perishable commodity and delaying or prohibiting its publication may deprive it of its value and interest. An injunction must, therefore, be reasonably proportionate so as not to curb open debate on issues of public importance.

On 28 February I received a reply from Minister Kasoulides assuring me that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus attaches great importance to media freedom, media pluralism, and the protection of journalists. Rule of law and the full respect for human rights are embedded in the Constitution, legislation and institutions.

### **Czech Republic**

On **30 January** I issued a public statement condemning a violent attack on reporters at an event in a hotel in Prague following the election of the Czech president. On 27 January, an activist at the president's campaign headquarters physically attacked reporters who were filming an incident and damaged their equipment. Among those attacked were a Seznam television reporter and operators for TV Nova and iDnes.cz.

On **13 April** I issued a public statement calling on the authorities to respect journalists' rights to protect confidential sources, following complaints by investigative journalists Jaroslav Kmenta from The Reporter, Janek Kroupa from Czech Radio and Sabina Slonkova from Neovlivni.cz that they had been pressured by police investigators to disclose their sources.

### **Denmark**

On **26 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the conviction of the murderer of Swedish journalist Kim Wall and his sentencing to life imprisonment.

### **France**

On **27 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my support for the French media outlet Le Point, following several incidents in France during which supporters of the Turkish government removed the French weekly's cover from newsstands and billboards. I noted that intimidation against media and the attempt to export censorship to other countries are unacceptable

## **Georgia**

On **20 March** I wrote to the authorities and made a statement from my official Twitter account expressing concern about a physical attack on news channel Rustavi-2 journalists, by a group of protesters. One of the journalists, David Eradze, was reportedly injured and hospitalized. I urged authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure journalists' safety.

On 8 June I learned that the Tbilisi City Court released five people involved in the protest on bail and remanded two others into pre-trial custody.

## **Germany**

On 19 December I received a statement from the authorities in reply to my public statement of 4 October concerning the Network law Enforcement Act (Netz DG). The statement said that the Act was compatible with the international human rights law, in particular, ICCPR Art. 19 & 20 and the Rabat Plan of Action and that it targeted social network providers with the aim to prevent distribution of the criminal content.

On **20 December** I wrote to the authorities asking for consideration in the case of Azerbaijani journalist Leyla Mustafayeva and her daughter who received temporary residence under the programme of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom in Leipzig (ECPMF).

## **Hungary**

On **9 March** I made a public statement emphasizing that journalistic work should never be criminalized, in reaction to the conviction of Hungarian journalist Gergely Nyilas, who reported about migration.

In August 2015, Nyilas, an investigative journalist with the online news site Index.hu, entered Hungary pretending to be an asylum seeker from Kyrgyzstan. After he voluntarily revealed himself to the authorities, he was accused of forging public documents and misleading the authorities. On 6 March of this year, a court in the city of Győr acknowledged the public role of journalists, but ordered the journalist to cover the costs of the lawsuit.

I emphasized that journalists have a key role in reporting on issues of public interest such as the refugee crisis.

On **12 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that the closure of the daily Magyar Nemzet and of the radio station Lanchid (Chainbridge) will further decrease media pluralism in the country. I added that the uncertain future of critical television news channel Hir TV (News TV) was of further concern. I recalled that an independent and diverse media environment is essential for a well-informed public, and its loss in Hungary is worrying.

On **13 April** I released a public statement strongly condemning the publication of a list of more than 200 people who allegedly had tried to "topple the government" by a Hungarian media outlet.



The list was published by the Hungarian magazine Figyelő on 11 April, and included many journalists as well as other citizens. The magazine claimed that the people on the list were “mercenaries” paid by US-Hungarian investor George Soros.

I noted that blacklisting and vilification of journalists and others is unacceptable, dangerous and ignominious. Not only does it stigmatize those on the list, it also puts their safety at risk.

On **7 May** I issued a public statement questioning the denial of accreditation for several journalists by the authorities, warning that such action sets a bad precedent on the part of the Parliament. On 4 May Tamas Fabian from the news website index.hu, Tamas Botos from the investigative website 444.hu, and Balazs Kaufmann from the news website hvg.hu were notified by the press office of the Hungarian Parliament that their accreditation request to report from the inaugural meeting of Hungary’s new parliament on 8 May had been denied.

I reminded that accreditation should not be used as a tool to curb critical reporting, noting that all three media outlets are regarded as critical of the government.

On **23 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I called it regrettable that journalists from The Guardian, from online media outlets index.hu, magyarnarancs.hu, hvg.hu and from other foreign or independent media outlets were denied accreditation to cover “The Future of Europe”, a conference held by the Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrad countries, co-hosted by the country’s Foreign Ministry.

## Italy

On **9 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned an attack on journalists Daniele Piervincenzi and Edoardo Anselmi in Ostia, and welcomed the reaction by Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and the Italian Ministry of Interior.

On **17 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed an initiative by the Italian Ministry of Interior to create a co-ordination centre for freedom of information to improve the safety of journalists in the country, together with media organizations and the Department of Public Security.

On **26 January** I wrote to the authorities conveying my concern regarding the detention in Rome of Anastasia Tovt, a Ukrainian journalist for the online newspaper Strana.ua. Reportedly she was subjected to a fully-body search and part of her equipment was confiscated.

On 12 March I received a reply from the authorities with information that Anastasia Tovt had not indicated that she was a journalist, and that it had been determined that she had not committed any crimes and that her equipment would be given back to her.

On **21 February** I wrote to the authorities requesting additional information on a search conducted at the editorial offices of *Fanpage.it* that lead to the seizure of documents. Reportedly, the search was carried out as part of a corruption and waste trafficking investigation of Francesco Piccinini, Director, and Sacha Biazzo, a journalist for the publication.

On **22 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern regarding the recent declarations made by the Minister of Interior on the protection and safety of journalist Roberto Saviano who has been threatened by the mafia. I called for protection of all journalists regardless of political view.

### **Kazakhstan**

On **16 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of the Chairman of the Union of Journalists in Kazakhstan, Seytkazy Mataev. I expressed concerns about the unnecessarily stringent conditions of his parole.

On **5 April** I issued a public statement criticizing the temporary detention of journalists and editors from Ratel.kz and Forbes Kazakhstan, and the blocking of the Ratel.kz webpage in Kazakhstan, and emphasised that blocking an online news resource is a disproportionate restriction on freedom of expression.

On **22 - 24 May** I travelled to **Almaty** to attend the 15th Eurasian Media Forum, where I spoke on panels on the evolution of information technology and the evolution of mass media. During the event I met with Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Dr. Dariga Nazarbayeva, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Abdrakhmanov, and Minister of Information and Communications Dauren Abayev, to discuss media freedom issues in Kazakhstan.

On **28 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that the court decision in Kazakhstan on the closure of Ratel.kz and the one-year ban on use of the name 'Ratel' including for distribution of related content is an unacceptable restriction of media freedom. I stressed that Ratel and its journalists should not be prevented from publishing and doing their work.

On **28 June** I wrote to the authorities to express my concern about the detention and general efforts to hinder the work of several journalists in Uralsk, Aktobe and Astana covering unauthorised rallies on 23 June.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

On **4 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that the Supreme Court in Kyrgyzstan upheld the verdict in the case of media outlet Zanoza for insulting ex-president Atambaev. I emphasized that disproportionate and high fines are detrimental to the freedom of media.

On **12 December** I wrote to the authorities raising my concern about the deportation of Agence France Press correspondent Chris Rickelton from the Manas airport in Bishkek on 10 December. I called on the authorities to respect the rights of foreign journalists.

On **21 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I highlighted the case of TV Channel NTS in Kyrgyzstan, whose property was seized by court decision the day before. I emphasized that broadcasting of the channel should not be stopped.

On **14 February** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern about a criminal investigation against freelance journalist and FerganaNews correspondent Elnura Alkanova who was

charged with breaking bank secrecy while reporting about alleged corruption in the real estate market in the country.

On **15 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I raised the case of Elnura Alkanova, freelance journalist and correspondent for FerganaNews, in a letter to Kyrgyz authorities. I emphasized that investigative journalism is at the heart of media freedom, and that journalists must be free to report without facing a criminal investigation.

On 27 April I was informed that a criminal case against Alkanova was dropped.

On **27 April** I issued a public statement and welcomed the recent decision by the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov to drop all financial claims against Kabay Karabekov, a journalist for the 24.kg news agency. The journalist was facing severe financial hardship following a conviction for defamation.

On **21 May** I welcomed, in a public statement, the move by former President Almazbek Atambaev to drop monetary claims in a defamation suit against the now-defunct Kyrgyz media outlet Zanoza.kg, and journalists Dina Maslova and Naryn Ayyp. I expressed hope that this move may herald a new, constructive relationship between the media and authorities in Kyrgyzstan.

### **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

On **13 - 14 November** I paid an official visit to **Skopje** to discuss various media related topics including changes to the legislation on audio-visual media, public service media reform and the safety of journalists. During my visit I met with the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov, the Speaker of Parliament Talat Xhaferi, the Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski, the Minister for Information Society and Administration Damjan Mancevski, and the Minister without portfolio in charge of Communications, Accountability and Transparency Robert Popovski as well as various media representatives. During my meeting with the Foreign Minister, it was agreed, following his kind suggestion, that the next South East Europe conference would take place in the country and we discussed our cooperation with regards to the conference.

On **9 February** I shared with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Dimitrov and Minister of Information Society and Administration Damjan Mancevski our second legal review of the draft law amending the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services prepared by Prof. Dr. Katrin Nyman-Metcalf a renowned international expert in communications law.

(see Legal reviews)

On **7 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the threats and insults levied at Naser Selmani, the President of AJM, on social media as unacceptable. I stated that, as a direct attack on freedom of expression, the case should be swiftly investigated and the journalists' safety ensured.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities to present a legal review and recommendations regarding the regulation of online content in South East Europe. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional

cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies.

(see Legal reviews)

## **Malta**

**On 21 November** I wrote a letter to Minister of Justice, Culture and Local Government Owen Bonnici, to present a legal analysis of the draft law of the Republic of Malta “to provide for the updating of the regulation of media and defamation matters and for matters consequential or ancillary thereto”.

In the letter I expressed hope that in addition to my Office’s efforts to assist in the ongoing legal reforms, developments in the field of improving safety of journalists in Malta would also take place soon. I expressed, once again, my hope that the investigation of the murder of prominent investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia would quickly bring tangible results, and that those responsible for this terrible crime would soon face justice.

(see Legal reviews)

**On 27 November** I made a public statement about the presentation of the legal analysis on the draft law of the Republic of Malta “to provide for the updating of the regulation of media defamation matters and for matters consequential or ancillary thereto”.

(see Legal reviews)

On 30 November I received a letter from the authorities informing me that the Government has never fostered a culture of impunity with regards to attacks against journalists, as evidenced by the commitment to effectively investigate the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia. The letter noted that the publication of details related to any ongoing investigation runs the risk of being counter-productive to the proper administration of justice.

**On 6 December** I issued a public statement welcoming murder charges issued against three people in the case of the car explosion that killed Daphne Caruana Galizia on 16 October 2017. I expressed hope that all those involved in this horrific crime, - both perpetrators and masterminds - would be identified, arrested and brought to justice. I recalled that, for many years, the journalist had been subject to severe harassment and threats for her critical work.

**On 24 January** I wrote to Minister Bonnici, presenting a brief legal analysis of a note sent to my Office by the authorities on 8 January. The note concerned the recommendations set out in the legal analysis shared with authorities by my Office 21 November 2017.

The analysis welcomed the fact that some of the recommendations from the November analysis had been taken on board in the latest draft law.

(see Legal reviews)

On 29 January I received a reply letter from Minister Bonnici, informing me that my Office’s recommendation concerning actions to be taken by the operator of a website following a notice of complaint was taken on board. The draft law was modified in sub-clause (5) of

Clause 12, emphasizing the need to guarantee the proper balance between the possible defamatory nature of any statement and the possible public interest in its publication.

**On 15 May** I issued a statement publicly welcoming the entering into force of Malta's new Media and Defamation Act, and called on the authorities to engage in further legal and policy reforms on civil defamation legislation.

I noted that the decriminalization of defamation and libel was an important step toward alleviating the pressures faced by journalists in the country. I recalled that, among other provisions, the new legislation establishes maximum compensation amounts to be granted by civil courts and the protection of informants will be extended to apply to any editor, publisher, author, website or broadcast operator.

I recalled that several civil defamation lawsuits continue to result in extreme financial and psychological pressure on the family of Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was facing 47 libel lawsuits at the time of her death. 34 of these lawsuits, all of them civil libel proceedings, continue to seek damages from the journalist's family.

I emphasized that it should not be possible to pass on liability to family members in defamation cases, and called on public officials to have a higher threshold for criticism. Given that many of the plaintiffs are high-level public officials, I urged them to drop these lawsuits.

## **Moldova**

**On 29 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I reiterated my call on the authorities to refrain from denying Russian media workers entry to the country, following the detention of journalists from Zvezda and VGTRK channels.

**On 18 January** I wrote to the authorities raising my concern about members of foreign media being denied entry into Moldova, including journalist Irada Zeynalova from Russian NTV television channel and the Ukrainian media expert from the NGO Detector Media Roman Shutov. Reportedly, both media representatives were denied entry due to failure to disclose the purpose of their visit. Later, Zeynalova was allowed to enter the country.

I encouraged the authorities to refrain from denying foreign journalists entry to the country and to allow them to pursue their professional activities (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017 and 10 March 2016).

**On 23 January** I wrote to the authorities to address the issue of members of foreign media being denied entry to the country. The crew of Russian RTVI television channel, Marianna Minsker and Alexander Naumenko, were denied entry, reportedly, due to their failure to disclose the purpose of the visit. According to RTVI, the journalists' visit was previously cleared with Moldova's presidential administration and the relevant document was presented to the border guards (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017 and 10 March 2016).

**On 7 March** I wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Tudor Ulianovschi raising my concern about the application of amendments to the Audiovisual

Code, which were signed into law by the President of the Parliament on 10 January 2018, as a disproportionate interference in media actor's activities.

My Office has studied the amendments with due attention and noted that the law allows broadcasters and cable operators to disseminate TV and radio programming with informative, analytical-informative, military and political content produced in the EU, US and Canada, as well as other countries that have ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The law, however, also introduces steep fines for violations of the above provision making the amendments somewhat confusing as they introduce restrictions for violation of the provisions that *allow*, and not *prohibit*.

After noting reports that, on 26 February, the Council for Coordination on Audiovisual Activity decided to impose a fine on channel RTR-Moldova of 50 thousand MDL for airing part of a news segment produced in the Russian Federation, I strongly encouraged the authorities to reconsider this restrictive practice and to provide clarification on implementation of the law.

On **8 June** I wrote to Tudor Ulianoschi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and Dragoş Vicol, President of the Council for Coordination on the Audiovisual Activity, again raising my concern about the restrictive application of the Audiovisual Code against some broadcasters.

After noting reports that, on 5 April, the Council for Coordination on the Audiovisual Activity imposed a fine of 70 thousand MDL on 'General Media Group Corp.' Ltd., the founder of Prime television network, for airing a programme produced in the Russian Federation, and on 8 June, imposed a fine of 85 thousand MDL again on channel RTR-Moldova, for airing the Victory Parade from Moscow on 9 May, I reiterated my call on the authorities to reconsider such restrictive practices and to provide clarification as to the manner of implementation of the law.

On **11 June** I wrote to Andrian Candu, the Chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, following his request on 25 April to provide a legal review of the draft Code of Audiovisual Media Services.

(see Legal reviews)

## **Montenegro**

On **1 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I underlined an important decision by the Constitutional Court of Montenegro in the case of the attack on journalist Tufik Softić, noting that impunity will not prevail only when all attacks against journalists are swiftly and thoroughly investigated.

On **5 - 6 February** I visited Montenegro to get first-hand information on the media freedom situation in the country. During my visit I met with representatives of the media community, Prime Minister Duško Marković, Minister of Foreign Affairs Srđan Darmanović, and Minister of Culture Aleksandar Bogdanović in Podgorica to discuss most important media issues including the safety of journalists, the independence of the Public Service Broadcaster RTCG, self-regulation of the media and support to professional standards. We also discussed the South East Europe Media Conference, taking place in May.

In my meetings, I emphasized the responsibility of the RTCG to cover issues of public interest and that it must be free to work without political pressure, and that I will closely monitor the situation following the dismissal of three members of the RTCG Council. Furthermore, I noted the importance of the re-establishment of the Commission monitoring investigations of attacks and threats against journalists and on media property.

**On 3 April** I issued a public statement condemning a bomb attack in front of the house of Vijesti journalist Sead Sadiković in Bijelo Polje. I also welcomed the swift investigation conducted by local police, which resulted in the arrest of two individuals suspected of the attack.

**On 9 May** I travelled to Podgorica following the shooting of journalist Olivera Lakić the previous day. In Podgorica I visited the journalist in hospital, met with the management and the staff of the newspaper Vijesti, where she works, and met with the Foreign Minister to discuss the authorities' response to the attack on the journalist.

Together with OSCE Head of Mission to Montenegro Maryse Daviet, I publicly condemned the attack against journalist Olivera Lakić in Montenegro and noted that it was not an isolated incident, as the journalist was attacked and beaten six years ago. In addition, I welcomed the public condemnations by the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament, and the investigation that was launched by the authorities.

**On 7 June** I issued a public statement expressing concern over the dismissal of the Montenegrin Public Service Broadcaster Director General. I noted that many in the media community and civil society had expressed fears that changes in the composition of the RTCG Council would lead to changes in the management and that those fears have been, unfortunately, confirmed.

Furthermore, I said that the independence of the public service broadcaster is essential for democracy and that there should be no political interference in its management.

**On 8 June** I wrote to the authorities to present a legal review and recommendations regarding the regulation of online content in South East Europe. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies.

(see Legal reviews)

## **Netherlands**

**On 8 June** I wrote a letter to the authorities requesting information regarding a case of a Dutch journalist whose phone data was taken during an investigation on the leaking of classified information. I emphasized that the protection of sources for journalists is an important element of media freedom.

On 28 June I received a reply from the authorities informing me that the Public Prosecutor acknowledges that an incorrect judgement was delivered regarding the application of coercive measures, adding that the Board of Procurators General has taken responsibility for the state of affairs, and acknowledges that journalists should be able to do their work freely and without restrictions.

On **22 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned an attack against the premises of several Dutch media the previous day, including outlets Panorama and Nieuwe Revu, known for their investigative reporting on organized crime, in which an anti-tank missile was shot at the building. I learned that the police arrested a suspect that same day.

On **26 June** I issued a public statement condemning the arson attack on the offices of De Telegraaf newspaper. I noted that the attack came only five days after an anti-tank rocket was fired at the offices of the weeklies Panorama and Nieuwe Revu and welcomed the Prime Minister's immediate condemnation of the attack.

## **Poland**

On **14 December** I issued a public statement condemning the imposition of a fine of 1.48 million Polish Zlotys (352,000 euros) on one of the country's leading independent broadcasters, TVN SA, for coverage of opposition demonstrations in Warsaw. I called the decision unjustified and disproportionate, as it undermines independent media in the country. On **12 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the decision to cancel the fine on TVNSA.

On **1 February** I issued a public statement expressing my concern regarding a new law criminalising statements on historical events. I stated that the law, which can set fines or a maximum three year jail term, represents a disproportionate restriction on freedom of expression and expressed my hope that the law would be vetoed by the President.

On 15 March I learned that the Warsaw prosecutor's office decided to drop "terrorism" charges against Polish investigative reporter Tomasz Piątek (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **24 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern regarding criminal charges brought against Polish journalist Antoni Szpak, who faces the risk of imprisonment for "insulting the Polish nation" due to a satirical column he wrote. I reiterated that prohibitions on insult to the state, its authorities or its institutions should be repealed.

On **28 June** I welcomed, in a public statement, the initiative by the Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki, to amend the 'Holocaust law' and the swift decision by the lower house of Poland's parliament to remove criminal penalties for ascribing any responsibility to the Polish nation for the Holocaust, including suggestions regarding its complicity. The criminal penalties – which would impose a fine or a three-year prison term on Polish citizens or foreigners for using terms such as "Polish extermination camps" – had been enacted under the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance on 26 January 2018. While welcoming the decision to remove the criminal law provisions of the 'Holocaust law', I also cautioned that some provisions of the law remain problematic from a freedom of expression perspective.



## **Romania**

On **5 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about a case of intimidation against journalist Dragoş Boţa from PRESSALERT.ro whose car was set on fire in Timisoara, and urged for a swift and thorough investigation.

## **Russian Federation**

On **15 November** I wrote to the authorities to reply to their letter of 13 November regarding the requirement by TV channel RT America to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in the United States. I noted that I had written to the United States' authorities requesting more information on the reasons behind the decision and how it will impact on the media outlet's ability to work and report in the country.

On **16 November** I sent a letter to the authorities and issued a public statement expressing my concern regarding the adoption of measures by the United States and Russian Federation requiring media entities from other countries to register themselves as "foreign agents", in particular amendments to mass media legislation allowing Russian authorities to designate certain media outlets in this category. I called on both the United States and Russian Federation to reconsider and refrain from requiring media entities to register as "foreign agents" and not take further steps. At the same time, several media outlets with links to the United States, including Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, received a notification from the Ministry of Justice informing them that they would likely need to register as "foreign agents."

(see United States under Issues raised with participating States)

I learned that the amendments were subsequently adopted and signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on 25 November.

On 21 November I received an official response from the authorities indicating that the amendments were introduced as a response to the United States' restrictive measures toward Russian media.

On 5 December I learned that the Ministry of Justice included Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, as well as seven other online news platforms affiliated with these media, on the list of "foreign agents".

On **23 November** I issued a public statement following my official visit to the Russian Federation where I met with Alexey Volin, Vice-Minister of Telecommunications and Mass Communications, Maria Zakharova, Director of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alexey Pushkov, Chair of the Committee of the Federal Council on Information Policy and Co-operation with the Media, Leonid Levin, Chair of the Committee of the State Duma on Information Policy, Information Technologies and Communication, and Mikhail Fedotov, Chair of the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights.

I called on the authorities to step up efforts to ensure that media freedom is guaranteed in the country and offered the support of my Office in safeguarding a diverse and pluralistic media landscape.

I, once again, raised the cases of Ukrainian journalists Mykola Semena, convicted in Crimea, Ukraine, Roman Sushchenko, arrested in Moscow and Stanislav Aseev, detained in Donetsk. I also raised the cases of Igor Rudnikov, arrested in Kaliningrad and the Uzbek journalist Khudoberdi Nurmatov (Ali Feruz) in Moscow.

During the trip I also visited the offices of the Ekho Moskvy radio station and the investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta, where I paid tribute to murdered journalist Anna Politkovskaya, and met with media freedom defenders from civil society.

On 21 November, prior to the visit to Moscow, on invitation by the Russian Union of Journalists I spoke at the Dialogue of Cultures: XII Media Forum of Young Journalists in Saint Petersburg and met with representatives of the media and civil society.

On **29 November** I wrote to the authorities to reiterate concern regarding anti-extremism legislation and its application, following the decision of a Saint-Petersburg court to sentence Vladimir Timoshenko to two years in a penal colony for incitement of hatred against a group of high-ranking Russian officials on social media.

I also expressed concern regarding the case of Yulia Zavyalova, Editor of the news website “Bloknot Volgograda” in Volgograd, who found that the brakes of her car had been damaged, with significant evidence suggesting the damage was intentional. I urged the authorities to thoroughly investigate the case.

On **29 November** I wrote to the authorities reiterating my call for the release of Roman Sushchenko, following the court’s decision to extend his arrest for two more months. I asked that Sushchenko be granted regular meetings with his close relatives.

On **21 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about the extension of the detention of journalist Igor Rudnikov (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On 21 March I received a reply from the authorities confirming Rudnikov’s arrest on charges of extortion and information that the investigation will continue.

On **22 December** I issued a public statement and wrote a letter to the authorities condemning the violent attack on Vyacheslav Prudnikov, a journalist for the news website “Kavkazskiy Uzel”, in the town Krasniy Sulin in the Rostov region. On 21 December Prudnikov was shot multiple times by an unknown person. The journalist was hospitalized for his injuries.

I urged the authorities to speedily and effectively investigate the case.

On 21 March I received a reply from the authorities indicating that law enforcement launched an investigation based on charges of “deliberate infliction of slight damage to health”.

On **4 January** I replied to the authorities’ letters from 7, 13 and 15 December regarding incidents and developments involving journalists, as well as legislative initiatives related to media in Ukraine. I said that, within the scope of my Mandate, I have and will continue to raise issues that contradict OSCE media freedom commitments with respective authorities.

On **16 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to their 10 January letter regarding the amendments in Moldova’s Audiovisual Code. I noted, however, that the amendments contain somewhat confusing language, and my Office will follow their application to see whether they affect freedom of the media in the country.

On **25 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to their letter on 12 January requesting information on OSCE best practices in countering the spread of extremist and terrorist propaganda through mass-media and on the Internet. I sent a report prepared by my Office on international legal standards including OSCE commitments as applied to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism measures, key legal cases, comparative approaches and compatibility of blocking measures with international standards on freedom of expression (see Legal Reviews).

On **25 January** I issued a public statement welcoming the decision by the Supreme Court in the case of Uzbek journalist Khudoberdi Nurmatov, also known under his penname Ali Feruz, a contributing journalist to Novaya Gazeta. I asked the authorities to release the journalist and allow him to travel freely (see Report to the Permanent Council 9 November 2017).

On **26 January** I issued a public statement and wrote a letter to Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, to recommend that Parliament not adopt the draft law that, through amendments to the “Statute on the Mass Media”, extends the status of a “foreign agent” to individuals and introduces and tightens requirements for legal entities. The same draft law introduces amendments to the telecom law that would allow for blocking of access to entire web platforms that are used to disseminate information via or originating from a foreign agent without a prior court order.

I said that the draft law represents a disproportionate obstacle to freedom of expression and media freedom, and may also have a considerable chilling effect.

On **29 January** I wrote to the authorities regarding the case of Alexander Valov, a blogger and Editor of the news website BlogSochi, who was detained by police and, two days later, arrested on extortion charges.

I asked the authorities to carefully review the serious charges brought against him.

On 21 March I received a reply from the authorities confirming the arrest on charges of large-scale extortion.

On **9 February** I replied to a letter from the authorities on 7 February regarding the situation of Ihor Huzhva, Editor-in-chief of Strana.ua news website in Ukraine.

On **15 February** I issued a public statement welcoming the decision of the judiciary to release the Uzbek journalist Khudoberdi Nurmatov, also known under his penname Ali Feruz, and allow him to leave the country (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **15 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about the blocking of website Navalny.com by Roskomnadzor based on an investigative report. I

emphasized that claims of privacy cannot be used to prevent reporting on issues of public interest or to justify the blocking of a website.

On **21 February** I wrote to the authorities to reply to letters sent on 15 February regarding developments around Ukrainian Media Holding “Vesti” and on 20 February regarding the suspension of TV channel “RTR Planeta” in Lithuania.

I informed the authorities that I requested more information from the Ukrainian authorities on Media Holding “Vesti” case.

Regarding “RTR Planeta” case, I noted that the decision of the national media regulator was done in accordance with the law, as the channel had repeatedly violated regulation requirements.

On **9 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about the growing number of reports of sexual harassment of female journalists by members of the State Duma. I stressed that the Chair of the State Duma’s advice to journalists to change jobs if they feel insecure is unacceptable and insisted that reported incidents be thoroughly investigated.

On **16 March** I wrote to the authorities in reply to their letter on 14 March regarding developments involving Russian journalist Elizaveta Gerson and Russian media accredited in the United Kingdom.

On **23 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I emphasized that the stripping of media accreditation by the State Duma following journalists’ protest against the Duma’s denial of allegations of sexual harassment would be a restriction of media freedom. I urged the State Duma to reinstate accreditation for all journalists.

On **6 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about the seizure of copies of Novye Kolesa newspaper and vendors’ refusal to distribute it following the arrest of Editor Igor Rudnikov (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **13 April** I wrote to the authorities in reply to their letter of 30 March regarding the broadcasting of channel “Russia Today” (RT) in the United States of America. According to the information available, RT was no longer broadcast in the Washington D.C. metro area as of April 1, as the owner of the digital stations that carried the channel and other foreign news services auctioned off its share of airwave usage for use by developers of wireless applications. I also noted reports that RT would continue to work with other distribution partners in Washington D.C., and that it continues to air in other U.S. cities.

On **13 April** I wrote to the authorities in reply to their letter of 6 April regarding the “restrictive measures taken by the management of Facebook and Instagram social networks to block accounts of some Russian media, including the Federal News Agency.” I stated that my Office is actively engaged in the issue of the role and responsibilities of internet intermediaries and will follow related developments and advocate for greater intermediary transparency.

On **13 April** I issued a public statement expressing concern about a court's decision to block the Telegram messaging and social networking application upon the authorities' request. I said that this decision hampers the important role of internet intermediaries in facilitating the exercise of freedom of expression and called on the authorities to reconsider this restrictive measure and to promote a free, independent and diverse communications environment.

I also noted with regret that on 12 April, the State Duma adopted legislative amendments allowing authorities to enforce blocking of access to online information once it has been considered defamatory by a court of law and removal orders upon request of the plaintiff (see Report to the Permanent Council of 26 November 2015).

On 22 May I received a reply on the legislative amendments. In the letter, the authorities stated that the amendments have no potential to limit media freedom.

On 14 June I learned that the Moscow City Court upheld the decision to block Telegram.

On **16 April** I issued a public statement and on **17 April** wrote a letter calling on the authorities to carry out a full, transparent and independent investigation into the circumstances of the death of Maksim Borodin, journalist with the Noviy Den news agency, who reported on various issues, including crime, politics, elections, and most recently mercenaries in the Syrian war. Borodin died from injuries sustained on 12 April in a fall from the window of his fifth-floor apartment.

I also raised concern about the attack on Dmitry Polyinin, Editor of Oblastnaya Gazeta newspaper and a journalist, who was brutally beaten on 12 April near his home in Yekaterinburg. I asked the authorities to swiftly and thoroughly investigate this criminal act and bring the perpetrators and masterminds to justice.

On **23 April** I wrote to the authorities in reply to a letter of 18 April regarding the seven investigations into TV Novosti, which holds the license for RT, by the UK's broadcast regulator, Ofcom. I said that I will monitor any developments and outcome of the investigations.

On 11 May I learned that a district court in Moscow found Boris Grits, who stabbed Tatyana Felgenhauer, Deputy Editor and presenter at Echo Moskvy radio station, in October 2017, unfit to stand trial and ordered his compulsory treatment in a psychiatric facility (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **15 May**, following the introduction of an amendment to the Criminal Code which penalizes "facilitation" of foreign sanctions toward public or private persons of the Russian Federation, I issued a public statement and wrote a letter to Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly on 14 May pointing to the threat the amendment poses to media freedom and freedom of expression in the country.

I urged the Parliament to take into consideration the need to preserve freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

On 18 May I received a reply from the authorities indicating that the draft law "...is not aimed at restricting freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The goal is to provide

legal framework for an adequate response to unfriendly actions by certain States against the Russian Federation”.

On **18 May** I wrote to the authorities in reply to a letter of 15 May regarding the developments around the News and Information Agency “RIA Novosti Ukraine”.

On **22 May** I wrote to the authorities in reply to a letter of 10 May regarding the deportation of two journalists who work for Russian media outlets from Ukraine and the attempted arson attack on Inter television channel in Kyiv. I said that I will continue to encourage participating States to fulfil their OSCE commitments and refrain from any attempts to restrict the free flow of information.

On **1 and 4 June** I sent a letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and issued a public statement, respectively, expressing concern about the continued detention of Oleg Sentsov, a writer and film director from Crimea, Ukraine.

I called on the Russian authorities to review Sentsov’s case and to release him immediately. I said that his detention is unjustified and creates a strong chilling effect for those in Crimea who have the right to express their views and opinions freely.

I also expressed concern about the deterioration of Sentsov’s health condition and morale after initiating a hunger strike on 14 May 2018.

On **4 June** I issued public statement in which I called the sentencing of Ukrainian journalist Roman Sushchenko to 12 years in prison deplorable, and reiterated my call to release the journalist.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities raising the cases of Anton Chablin, a journalist from Stavropol contributing to various news outlets, including the news platform Kavkazkiy-Uzel, and Viktor Korb, a well-known blogger in Omsk.

Chablin was attacked by two assailants, who hit the journalist in the face and fled the scene, on 26 May in Stavropol. Korb is under investigation on charges of public calls for terrorist activities related to an online post which contains verbatim citations from a defendant’s speech during a trial. I asked the authorities to carefully review the serious charges brought against Korb, in order not to undermine his legitimate right to freedom of expression.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities asking that they renew the passport of a contributor to the RFE/RL from Turkmenistan, Saparmamed Nepeskuliev to enable him to travel to see his mother and seek medical help.

On **13 June** I wrote a reply to a letter from Mikhail Fedotov, Adviser to the President of the Russian Federation and Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, on 31 May regarding the case of Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko in Kyiv.

I informed him of the statement I issued expressing relief that Babchenko is alive and well, but I deplored the decision to spread false information about the life of a journalist as it is the duty of the state to provide correct information to the public.

On **13 June** I wrote a reply to a letter from the authorities on 11 June questioning my statement in which I called for release of Oleg Sentsov, a writer and film director from Crimea, Ukraine. I said that my intervention was within the scope of my Mandate, as I consider the case a violation of Sentsov's right to freedom of expression.

On **13 June** I wrote to the authorities raising concern about a ban on travel for Estonian journalists, as part of a list of Estonian citizens barred from entering the country. Reportedly, the list was introduced in response to "unfriendly actions" on the part of the Estonian Government characterized by "anti-Russia political and public figures".

I said that the journalists should not be penalised for expressing their opinions. Nor should they be subject to retaliatory measures. I called on the authorities to remove journalists from this list as it limits their ability to travel between OSCE participating States, and refrain from such practices in the future.

On **19 June** I replied to a letter from Alexey Pushkov, Chairman of the Interim Commission on Information Policy and Interaction with the Media of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, on 15 June concerning media freedom in Ukraine, including the case of Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko in Kyiv.

I informed him of the statement I issued on 31 May expressing relief that Babchenko is alive and well, but I deplored the decision to spread false information about the life of a journalist as it is the duty of the state to provide correct information to the public. I also stated my intention to closely follow the case of Bureau Chief of RIA Novosti Ukraine, Kirill Vyshinsky, who was arrested in May.

On **4 July**, ahead of the second reading in the State Duma, I issued a public statement expressing my concern about the draft law amending the "Statute on the Mass Media", which extends the status of "foreign agent" not only to media but to individual journalists and other authors. Reportedly, the new legislation would, among other provisions, oblige individuals to publish reports about their financing and how it was used. I reiterated that the labelling of media and journalists as "foreign agents" anywhere in the OSCE region is a stigmatizing and discriminating practice that may negatively impact negatively their work and create a considerable chilling effect.

## **Serbia**

On 13 November I received a reply from the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Serbia Ivica Dačić with information related to cases I previously raised.

With regards to an assault against journalists Gordana Uzelac and Mara Dragović, the Interior Ministry informed me that police officers from the Police Directorate of the City of Belgrade arrested and placed a suspect in custody. Regarding the attack on RTS crew, the Prosecutor concerned found that there were no elements of criminality.

In the case of threats levied against internet portal "Magločistač", police officers were unable to identify the perpetrator since an anonymous internet access service had been used.

The Interior Ministry is working to identify the perpetrator of the attempted aggravated theft of the apartment of Dragana Pećo, a KRIK journalist.

Concerning the threat against Marija Vučić, a journalist from “Cenzolovka”, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade submitted a request to collect necessary information.

As to the incident of assault against journalists during the inauguration of the President, the Prosecutor, *ex officio* initiated the unified procedure for all instances of attacks and the Ministry of Interior has submitted supplementary documentation on this case to the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade.

On **27 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I joined journalists' associations in Serbia UNS and NUNS to condemn threats against Srbin info Chief Editor Dejan Petar Zlatanović.

On **7 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I said that labeling the independent journalists' association in Serbia (NUNS) as an enemy of the state seriously endangers the safety of journalists and the work of the association.

On **9 - 11 April** I paid an official visit to Serbia. During my visit I met with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić, State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture Aleksandar Gajović, journalists' associations, media experts, non-governmental organizations and investigative journalists in Belgrade. We discussed the issue of safety of journalists, combating impunity and media pluralism. In the meeting with President Vučić, we discussed the media strategy and the participation of civil society in order to create new impetus in the process and establish cooperation with my Office and the OSCE Mission to Serbia. This process is ongoing in coordination with the Mission. During the visit, I attended a memorial marking the 19th anniversary of the murder of prominent journalist Slavko Ćuruvija.

On **11 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, on the 19th anniversary of the killing of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, I called on the the authorities to protect and guarantee the safety of journalists and to end impunity for crimes committed against them.

On **17 April**, I issued two statements from my official Twitter account condemning the physical attack against the Prva Srpska Televizija crew in Leskovac, during which camera operator Vladeta Urošević sustained head injuries. I also welcomed the swift reaction of local police in Leskovac who detained a person suspected of the attack.

On **26 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the announcement by Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia to delay adoption of a media strategy and instead start a new process involving the OSCE. I expressed my wish that the process would create conditions for an inclusive debate with all stakeholders and media actors.

On **8 June** I wrote to the authorities to present a legal review and recommendations regarding the regulation of online content in South East Europe. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies.



(see Legal reviews)

On **11 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, on the 17th anniversary of the murder of journalist Milan Pantić, who was killed in front of his home in Serbia, I noted that his case is still unresolved and called on authorities to redouble their efforts to bring the perpetrators and masterminds to justice.

On **14 June** I issued a public statement urging Serbian authorities to do their utmost to find Stefan Cvetković, a journalist from Bela Crkva who was reported missing. I also welcomed the deployment of substantial police resources to find the journalist and President Vučić's attention to the case.

On **15 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed relief following the announcement of President Aleksandar Vučić that journalist Stefan Cvetković was found alive and well.

### **Slovakia**

On **26 February** I issued a public statement expressing shock and condemnation following the murder of investigative reporter Ján Kuciak and his fiancé in their home in Slovakia, and urged the authorities to pursue a full, transparent and swift investigation.

On **2 March** I issued a public statement following my visit to Bratislava to meet with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico as well as with Slovak journalists and to pay tribute to the murdered journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée. I met the Prime Minister together with Christophe Deloire, President of Reporters Without Borders, and Flutura Kusari from the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom.

I have received regular updates on the ongoing investigation from the authorities.

On **22 March** I wrote to the Slovak authorities and on **23 March** issued a public statement to express concern about a recently passed verdict in the case of journalist Lukáš Milan. Milan was convicted of defamation of a former Deputy Speaker of Parliament in an article on corruption, published in 2015, and given a suspended sentence of 18 months, conditional to three years.

On **22 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account following the verdict in case of Lukas Milan, I called for decriminalization of defamation in Slovakia and emphasized that banning journalists from doing their work runs contrary to freedom of expression.

On 15 May I received a letter from the authorities informing me of the status of the case of Lukáš Milan and assurance that the Ministry of Justice will monitor the case.

On **16 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that Pavla Holcova, from the Czech Center for Investigative Journalism, colleague of murdered journalist Jan Kuciak, was interrogated by Slovak police for eight hours on 15 May and her phone was taken. I emphasized that protection of journalists' sources must be recognized, that her phone should be returned and her privacy respected.

On 23 May I received information that on 16 May the Office of Prosecutor General instructed the Košice regional prosecutor to drop charges against Lukáš Milan due to factual inaccuracies in the case and an incorrect assessment of the defendant's appeal.

On **29 May** I wrote to the authorities raising the case of the Czech reporter Pavla Holcová, a colleague of the slain reporter Jan Kuciak, who was interviewed by the Slovak police on 15 May and pressured to disclose her sources as well.

On June 22 I was informed by the authorities that the supervising prosecutor, in the case of Pavla Holcová, advised the investigator that parts of the interrogation exceeded the subject of interrogation.

### **Switzerland**

On **5 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I congratulated the citizens of Switzerland for voting to save the mandatory licence fee financing public service broadcasting.

### **Tajikistan**

On **22 March** I wrote to the authorities to raise my concern about the arrest and pre-trial detention of Khayrullo Mirsaidov, a reporter with a number of national and international media outlets in Tajikistan over the past years. I called on the authorities to release Mirsaidov, as some of the charges were brought following his appeal to the President and other high-ranking officials that demanded an investigation into an instance of alleged corruption.

On **27 March** I wrote to the authorities and issued a public statement to communicate my concern about the publication by the National Bank of a list of persons with alleged connections to terrorists, including several journalists and bloggers.

On **27 March** in a statement from my official Twitter account I called on the Tajikistani authorities to remove the names of journalists and bloggers from the published list of persons with terrorist connections.

On 11 June I received information that the list of persons published by the National Bank had been modified and split into two categories: terrorists and extremists. Furthermore, most of the names mentioned in my statement of 27 March had been removed, leaving only four names still on the list. On **13 April** I issued a public statement and called on the Tajikistani authorities to release Khayrullo Mirsaidov from pre-trial detention. Mirsaidov faced charges of embezzlement of funds, falsification of documents, making false accusations, and incitement to inter-ethnic hatred.

On **18 May** it was brought to my attention that the charges of incitement to inter-ethnic hatred under Article 189 against Khayrullo Mirsaidov were dropped. The trial is on-going.

### **Turkey**

On **13 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I called for the release of journalists Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan, Nazlı Ilıcak and their colleagues, who have been imprisoned in Turkey for more than 400 days, and face harsh terrorism charges in court.

On **21 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed dismay over the court decision to convict Cumhuriyet online Editor Oğuz Güven of terrorism charges with a sentence of over three years of prison. I called for the charges against him to be dropped immediately.

On **22 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that the court decision to imprison journalist Ayşenur Parıldak for over seven years on unfounded charges was highly worrisome. I called on Turkey to release not only Parıldak, but all journalists in prison, and emphasized that journalism is not a crime.

On **6 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of journalists Tunca Öğreten and Mahir Kanaat in the Red Hack trial. I urged Turkey to urgently drop the charges against the journalists.

On **13 December** I issued a public statement repeating my call for Turkey to release imprisoned journalists, following the demand by the prosecution for aggravated life sentences for several journalists, including Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan and Nazlı Ilıcak in the so-called ‘coup attempt media trial’. The journalists are accused of violating the constitution and assisting in the preparations of the coup attempt in July 2016.

I noted that the state of emergency in effect in the country does not justify the restrictions placed on journalists. I called on the authorities to pay due attention to humanitarian considerations in the case of Şahin Alpay, who suffers from health problems in prison.

I also highlighted that 20 journalists from various media outlets, including Abdullah Kılıç, Habip Güler and Yakup Çetin, have been in pre-trial detention for over 500 days. They are accused of carrying out media activities on behalf of a terrorist organization, and face sentences from ten years to life without parole in prison. On 4 December the court ruled to continue their imprisonment.

I urged authorities to revisit the laws that allow for imprisonment for journalistic work, including the Anti-Terror Law, the Internet Law, and several provisions of the Criminal Code, and offered my Office’s continuous assistance in this process.

On **19 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern that former Art Director for Zaman daily, Fevzi Yazıcı, imprisoned since July 2017, was placed in solitary confinement and reportedly threatened at police headquarters.

On **25 December** I issued a public statement protesting the continued pre-trial detention of journalists from the prominent daily Cumhuriyet, following the fifth hearing on the case outside of Istanbul. Earlier that day, a court ruled that all four imprisoned Cumhuriyet staff must remain behind bars: Chairman Akın Atalay, Accountant Emre İper, Editor-in chief Murat Sabuncu, and prominent investigative journalist Ahmet Şık.

On **26 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my great concern over the continued trial against prominent journalist and OSCE media expert Erol Onderoglu, human rights defender and doctor Sebnem Korur Fincanci, and journalist Ahmet Nesin, for their symbolic support of the Kurdish daily Özgür Gündem. I urged Turkey to drop the charges against them and protect their journalistic work.

On **11 January** I issued a public statement welcoming the milestone ruling of the Constitutional Court to release journalists Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan. The decision stated that the detention of the journalists violated the Constitution of Turkey, that their rights have been violated, and that their detention was unjust. I expressed hope that this decision would also pave the way for the judiciary to urgently release all imprisoned journalists in the country.

On **11 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed alarm that the 13th and 26th Criminal Courts, where journalists Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan had been on trial, would only consider the 10 January Constitutional Court ruling to release the journalists once the Constitutional Court had published its decision in full. I urged for the immediate release of the two journalists.

On **17 January** I wrote to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu emphasizing that the refusal by a lower court to implement a Constitutional Court decision is of grave concern and seriously infringes on the rule of law and on freedom of expression. I called on the authorities to ensure that the Constitutional Court decision of 11 January 2018 is implemented and that the journalists are released without delay.

On **17 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the prison sentence of 18 months handed down to four journalists and three years nine months handed down to Chief Editor Hüseyin Aykol for “terrorism propaganda” in the final verdict of the Özgür Gündem trial. I emphasized that journalists are not terrorists, and that they should be protected, not criminalized.

On **19 January**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I honoured the 11 year anniversary of the assassination of prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. I urged the authorities to end impunity for violence against journalists, and increase their efforts to bring the masterminds behind his murder to justice.

On **26 January** I sent a letter to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and also publicly called on the authorities to drop terrorism charges against journalists and social media users reporting or commenting on the offensive launched in Afrin. I noted that, according to media reports, at least three journalists were arrested in Turkey along with more than a hundred social media users. The Editor of Halkın Nabzı newspaper İshak Karakaş, freelance journalist İdris Yılmaz and Mezopotamya news agency reporter Seda Taşkın were detained for their social media posts and charged with terrorism.

I emphasized that reporting to and informing the public about important and even sensitive issues has been recognized internationally as a crucial part of the journalistic profession. The media must be able to report and express their views freely, even in times of conflict or war.

I also expressed concern about the written instructions provided to editors and reporters at a press briefing in Ankara, attended by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ and Minister of Defense Nurettin Canikli, on how to report on military actions in northwestern Syria’s Afrin region. I recalled that journalists should not be instructed on the content of their work and that press freedom must be respected at all times.

On **6 February** I wrote to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and on **7 February** I issued a public statement contesting the detention of hundreds of social media users

for expressing their views on the Afrin operations in Syria and requested that authorities reconsider. According to the Turkish Interior Ministry, 449 people were detained and charged with propaganda for terrorism for their social media posts on Turkey's recent military operations in Afrin. The media also reported that, in many cases, detainees were only released under specific conditions such as restrictions on travel abroad or prohibitions on driving. Several of those detained remain in detention.

On **12 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I urged the authorities to publicly condemn all attempts to threaten journalists for their work, including the violence promoted by Yeni Akit TV against journalists from the daily Cumhuriyet.

On **16 February**, together with David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, I called the court decision to imprison journalists for life an unparalleled level of suppression of dissenting voices in the country.

At the conclusion of the fifth and final hearing of the "coup attempt media trial", the Istanbul 26th Heavy Penal Court ruled to hand down an aggravated life sentence for attempting to disrupt the constitutional order to six imprisoned defendants, including journalists Nazlı Ilıcak, Ahmet Altan and Mehmet Altan.

I emphasized that the magnitude of this sentence, and the fact that the court failed to implement a related, binding ruling of the Constitutional Court, raised fundamental questions about the ability of the judiciary to uphold the constitutionally protected right to freedom of expression. Together with Kaye, I called on the authorities to reverse the decision and release the journalists.

On **16 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of Deniz Yücel, a German-Turkish Die Welt journalist who spent one year in detention. I urged that all charges against the journalist be dropped.

On **28 February**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that the sentence of five years and 11 months imprisonment for journalist Ahmet Altan, who has already received an aggravated life sentence, was absurd and cruel. I reiterated that imprisoning journalists for their work is a gross violation of fundamental human rights.

On **28 February** I issued a public statement about a legal review shared with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül the previous day.

(see Legal reviews)

On **5 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that the recent banning of access in Turkey to online media outlet Ahval added to the concerning situation of widespread Internet freedom restrictions in the country. I reiterated my call to improve online freedom of expression in Turkey.

On **8 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted my concern about the decision of the 25th Criminal Court in Istanbul to imprison several journalists, including Murat Aksoy and Atilla Tas. I highlighted the fact that the serious charges were not substantiated during the investigation, and urged Turkey to free the journalists and drop the unfounded charges against them.

On **9 March** I issued a public statement welcoming the long-awaited release of Cumhuriyet journalists Ahmet Şık and Murat Sabuncu. I also repeated my call on the authorities to release CEO Akın Atalay, the last imprisoned defendant from the publication, and drop charges against all 17 defendants in the trial.

I recalled that, in more than one year the investigations had failed to substantiate any of the extreme charges the journalists stand accused of, and, despite this, they continue to face up to 43 years in prison if convicted of the charges, including "being a member of an illegal organization" and "aiding an illegal organization while not being a member".

I also urged authorities to revisit questions related to the independence of the judiciary and its ability to protect freedom of expression as a constitutional right, as well as the issue of the right of defendants to a fair trial.

On **9 March** I issued a public statement about the sentencing the previous day of 25 media workers, and said that it showed the immense pressure to which media are exposed in the country.

On 8 March, the İstanbul 25th Heavy Penal Court ruled to imprison 25 defendants accused of affiliation with the so-called "Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) media organization". Journalist and former singer Atilla Taş was sentenced to three years, one month and 15 days in prison, while journalist Murat Aksoy was sentenced to two years and one month; both of them for "knowingly and willingly aiding an illegal organization as a non-member".

I noted that of those sentenced to prison, 18 are already behind bars.

On **16 March** I issued a public statement following the 7<sup>th</sup> hearing of the Cumhuriyet trial in Silivri, outside of Istanbul. I noted that the decision to continue the detention of CEO Akın Atalay, in a trial that has failed to produce proof of any wrong-doing by the defendant, was unacceptable and deeply worrying. I recalled that Akın Atalay returned from Germany to Turkey on 11 November 2016 after a warrant was issued for his arrest. He was immediately detained at the Istanbul airport and arrested the next day, accused of membership in a terrorist organization. He has already spent over 500 days in Silivri's high security prison on unfounded charges.

On **16 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the Constitutional Court decision that journalist Şahin Alpay's rights have been violated. I reiterated my call on the authorities to ensure the implementation of the Constitutional Court's binding decision and release the journalist.

On **17 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed journalist Şahin Alpay's return home to his family after nearly 20 months in prison. At the same time, I noted that placing him under house arrest was contrary to the Constitutional Court ruling, and urged Turkey to drop all charges and set him free.

On **22 March** I issued a public statement following adoption by Turkey's parliament of a provision that further extends the already far-reaching powers of the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) in allocating licenses for online broadcasting.

I recalled that on 28 February, my Office issued a legal analysis of the then draft provision. I noted with regret that my Office's recommendations were not reflected in the adopted law, and that a public discussion involving all stakeholders had not taken place prior to the law's adoption.

On **29 March** I issued a public statement warning that the closure of the Özgürlükçü Demokrasi newspaper and appointing a trustee to head it was a major attack on the independence of the media outlet. Twenty-one of the staff from the newspaper and printing house had been taken into custody and are facing terrorism charges.

In a letter to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on the same day, I insisted that journalists should not be accused of terrorism for their journalistic activities. I called for the release of the detained staff, the dismissal of the charges against them, and for respect of the independence of the Özgürlükçü Demokrasi newspaper.

On **3 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I said that the issuance of a new arrest warrant for journalist Can Dundar and the court request to issue an Interpol Red Notice was deeply worrying. I noted that governments should not use Interpol to persecute journalists.

On **4 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that the handing down of a suspended prison sentence for an article that well-known journalist Hasan Cemal wrote almost 5 years before continued the highly worrying trend for freedom of expression in the country.

On **6 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I emphasized that a court decision for the pre-trial detention of two more employees from the media outlet Özgürlükçü Demokrasi, Ihsan Yaşar and İshak Yasul, was alarming. I urged authorities to respect the independence of the media and release the journalists.

On **17 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my worry about the arrest of Etkin Haber Ajans reporter Adil Demirci on terrorism charges, and the continued detention of journalists Semiha Şahin and Pınar Gayıp.

On **18 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I recalled that the interim decision to prolong the trial of those editors who pledged symbolic support to the, now closed, Kurdish newspaper Özgür Gündem, including journalists Erol Onderoglu and Ahmet Nesin, as well as human rights defender Sebnem Korur Fincanci, showed the continued chilling effect the trials impose on journalists. I repeated my call for their acquittal.

On **26 April** I issued a public statement welcoming the acquittal of three Cumhuriyet staff and the release of CEO Akın Atalay. At the same time, I strongly condemned the prison sentences issued by the court in Silivri to the majority of defendants.

The previous day, the Silivri Court ruled to acquit journalist Turhan Günay, former accountant Bülent Yener and Chief of accounts Günseli Özaltay. It also decided to release CEO Akın Atalay but sentenced him to more than seven years in prison for allegedly supporting a terrorist organization. The other defendants, including journalists Ahmet Şık, Murat Sabuncu and Kadri Gürsel were given prison sentences ranging from two years and six months to seven years and six months. All defendants facing prison are also subject to travel bans.

On **27 April** I sent a letter to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, calling on the authorities to reverse the sentences against the Cumhuriyet journalists and staff, and ensure that media

pluralism is respected and guaranteed in the country. I also asked the Minister to share with my Office updates on the appeals process in the Cumhuriyet trial.

On **30 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed concern about media reports that journalist Mahmut Özkilic was shot in Gaziantep on 27 April. I expressed trust that the investigation started by the authorities would soon shed light on the details of this attack.

On **2 May** I received a reply letter from the authorities to my letter dated 29 March stating that the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecution's Office initiated an investigation regarding the media outlet Özgürlükçü Demokrasi, based on the suspicion that the media outlet had published content supportive of the terror organization PKK/KCK/PYD-YPG and had contributed to the dissemination of the organization's ideology and intimidation in the context of Operation Olive Branch.

The letter also listed examples used by the Office of the Chief Prosecution to conclude that, given the routine, regular and systematic conduct of terrorist propaganda, the publication had served as an instrument of the terror organization. It said that the investigation had revealed that the printing house of Özgürlükçü Demokrasi had printed and distributed terrorist propaganda. During searches of the printing house and homes of the suspects, banned publications including outlawed books written by PKK/KCK leader Abdullah Öcalan, a gun and cartridges had been seized.

The letter noted that a trustee had been appointed to lead the newspaper, according to the decision of the Istanbul 7<sup>th</sup> Criminal Magistracy, and altogether 31 staff from the media outlet and its printing house had been detained, of whom 26 were arrested. The letter noted that the suspects enjoy the right of legal aid as well as appeal, and that the investigations were performed by an independent and impartial judiciary.

On **7 May** I issued a public statement emphasizing that the severity of punishment sought by prosecution against editor and human rights lawyer Eren Keskin and several journalists from the now closed Kurdish daily Özgür Gündem, accused of terrorism charges, were staggering. I recalled that more than 120 lawsuits had been filed against Keskin, who served as Editor-in-chief of Özgür Gündem between 2013 and 2016. She also faces high monetary fines, a travel ban and her work as a lawyer is under threat.

On **9 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I addressed the trial of prominent lawyer Veysel Ok who is accused of insulting the judiciary for his work defending journalists, including Die Welt correspondent Deniz Yücel. I urged that he be given a fair, transparent trial, taking into consideration his important work defending freedom of expression, when the case resumes on 4 July.

On **10 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I reiterated my call that Turkey respect freedom of expression on the occasion of the continuation of the trial of several former Zaman journalists in Istanbul, including journalists Ahmet Turan Alkan and Şahin Alpay.

On **14 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of journalists Ali Bulaç and Mehmet Özdemir from pre-trial detention, and the end of the house arrest for Şahin Alpay in the Zaman trial. I noted, however, that increased sentences against



other defendants, as well as the arrests of more journalists, remained of great concern.

On **24 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of journalist Erdogan Alamuyat pending trial, after 10 months in prison. I also expressed grave concern about 45 year sentence requested by the Prosecutor if Alamuyat is convicted for his work at the now closed DIHA news agency.

On **5 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that a prison sentence for cartoonist Nuri Kurtcebe based on drawings that allegedly insulted authorities, published three years prior, is unacceptable and disproportionate. I urged the authorities to reverse the decision and accept the role of cartoonists and satire in democracies.

On **13 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stressed that charges against Çağrı Sarı, the Managing Editor of Evrensel Daily, should be dismissed. In the on-going trial against her, Sarı faces up to six years of prison for reporting on links between the Paradise Papers and high level government officials.

On **26 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I stated that I shared the concerns of the Journalists' Union of Turkey that publishing a list of journalists and writers critical of the Nationalist Movement Party is dangerous and an attack on media freedom. I emphasized that it is unacceptable that political leaders publicly target journalists.

On **27 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the journalist Mehmet Altan's release from prison. I urged authorities to immediately repeal his life sentence and travel ban as well.

### **Turkmenistan**

On **10 November** I wrote to the authorities expressing my concern about an incident of intimidation against Khalida Izbastinova, mother of Farid Tukhbatullin, Editor of the Turkmenistan Chronicles, living in exile. I called on the authorities to swiftly identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

On **23 February** I wrote to the authorities and on **27 March** issued a public statement presenting a commentary on the national law "On Television and Radio Broadcasting", which was adopted on 5 January.

(see Legal reviews)

On **27 March**, in a statement issued from my official Twitter account, I called on the authorities to take measures supporting a pluralistic media landscape and freedom of expression following the adoption of the "On Television and Radio Broadcasting" law.

On **2 May** I wrote to the authorities asking for the details on the health of and the date of release for freelance journalist Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, who was serving a three-year prison sentence.

On **14 May** I wrote to the authorities bringing their attention to the brief detention of Soltan Achilova, correspondent with the Turkmen Service of the RFE/RL, following her photographing celebrations of the Victory Day In Ashgabat.

On **28 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed that journalist and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty contributor Saparmamed Nepeskuliev from Turkmenistan is finally free. I noted that his freedom comes after having already served a three-year prison term on trumped up charges.

On **13 June** I wrote to the authorities to bring their attention to an attack on the RFE/RL correspondent Soltan Achilova, who was physically assaulted in the Mary province on 9 June.

## **Ukraine**

On **16 November** I wrote to the authorities on a number of incidents involving journalists of the “Skhemy” investigative program, a joint project of Radio Liberty and public broadcaster “UA:Persnyi”, who were reportedly subject to harassment, attack and surveillance.

I urged the authorities to duly investigate all of these incidents.

On 5 January I received a reply from the General Prosecutor’s Office indicating that law enforcement has initiated pre-trial investigations on all cases.

In the same letter, the authorities provided information in response to my statement of 25 October 2017 about attacks on journalists by riot police outside a court house in Kyiv. I was informed that the Prosecutor’s Office launched a pre-trial investigation.

On **17 November** I issued a public statement expressing concern about the significant cut in funding for the public service broadcaster’s activities, after the Verkhovna Rada adopted a law on the state budget for 2018 which proposed approximately half of the required funding.

I called on the authorities to urgently explore effective mechanisms to ensure that the public service broadcaster receives necessary funding, as defined in legislation, to continue the important reform process and fully deliver on its remit (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On 30 December I learned that the law on the state budget for 2018 was signed by President Petro Poroshenko.

On 22 November I received a reply from the authorities regarding the cases I raised in my letters of 17 October and 3 November 2017. They informed me that the extraditions of the journalists Fikret Huseynli and Zhanar Akhmetova have not been finalized and that they have not received the request from Uzbekistan for extradition of journalist Narzullo Akhunjonov (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On 22 November I learned that Zhanar Akhmetova was released on bail.

On **4 December** I wrote to the authorities to express my concern regarding the detention and deportation of Tamaz Shashvishvili, a cameraman for Georgian television channel Rustavi-2, and Igor Petrashevich, a journalist with the Russian Federal News Agency. Reportedly, Petrashevich was accused of discrediting Ukraine with his journalistic materials and banned from entering the country for a period of three years.

I also repeated my request that the authorities not deport Fikret Huseynli, a journalist contributing to online channel Turan TV, back to Azerbaijan (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

**On 4 December** I issued a public statement about the deliberate blocking of the entrance to the editorial office of the NewsOne television channel by a group of people in camouflage and balaclavas with sandbags and barbed wire in Kyiv.

**On 12 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I reiterated that all charges against Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena of Krym.Realii in Crimea should be dropped as they violate OSCE principles on freedom of expression and media, and that the journalist should also be able to travel freely.

**On 18 December** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern regarding a number of incidents obstructing the work of local and foreign journalists. On 12 December Ruslan Kotsaba, a journalist from the NewsOne television channel, was attacked in downtown Kyiv and punched in the face while interviewing people on the street. On 6 December journalist Solomiya Kokiashvili, cameraman Zazi Shukvani and technician Levan Gulbani, all employees for the Georgian “First Channel”, were denied entry to the country. On 5 December Tamara Nutsbidze, correspondent with the TV company “Rustavi 2”, and Vakhtang Sanaya, correspondent of the TV channel “Pirveli”, were denied entry to the country.

I reiterated my call on the authorities to respect the right of foreign journalists and refrain from any measure which could impede their work.

On 27 March I received a reply from the authorities on Kotsaba’s case indicating that the National Police launched a pre-trial investigation.

**On 20 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I reiterated my call on all stakeholders that every effort be made to ensure the release of Donetsk journalist Stanislav Aseev after more than 6 months in detention.

**On 23 December** I issued a public statement expressing serious dismay at the four-year suspended sentence on hooliganism charges handed-down to the main attacker and organizer of the assault in the case of the murder of journalist Vyacheslav Veremyi in Kyiv.

I called on the authorities to fully and effectively investigate all deaths of journalists in Ukraine and mobilize all efforts to end impunity of such crimes.

On 13 June I learned that the appeals court changed the sentence of the assailant to five years in prison.

**On 28 December**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release from custody of blogger Eduard Nedelyaev and reiterated my call for all those responsible to release journalist Stanislav Aseev.

**On 3 January** I wrote to Andriy Parubiy, Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada, in connection with draft law #7354, which introduces restrictions related to the ongoing conflict in and around the country. The draft law makes it a criminal act, carrying a hefty fine or prison term,

to “publicly deny the fact of the military aggression on the part of the Russian Federation” and bans the production and distribution of materials containing such a denial. I expressed concern that the overly broad language of the proposed law lacks legal predictability and may subjectively and disproportionately expose citizens to criminal liability for exercising their right to free expression.

On 5 February I received a reply to my letter from Andrii Kozhemiakin from the Verkhovna Rada’s Committee on Legislative Support of Law Enforcement. Mr Kozhemiakin indicated that on 17 January, based on my letter, the Committee recommended the draft law be sent for revision.

On **18 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to an official presentation of a legal brief on the legal circumstances surrounding the release of journalists in Spain following an international Red Notice issued by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

(see Legal Reviews)

On **30 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to the official presentation of the Comparative Legal Analysis of Ukrainian Regulation of Hate Speech in the Media (see Legal Reviews).

On **9 February** I wrote to the authorities asking for more information about developments in the case of Ihor Huzhva, Editor-in-chief of Strana.ua, who left Ukraine after 6 January 2018, citing threats of physical violence and “unprecedented pressure from the authorities”. He has applied for political asylum in Austria. I further noted reports that a district court in Kyiv ordered the Huzhva’s arrest and the Prosecutor-General has publically stated his commitment to demand Huzhva’s extradition from Austria.

I also expressed concern about the justification for law enforcement’s search of Vesti premises, a news outlet founded by Huzhva.

On 27 March and 8 May I received replies from the authorities indicating that Ihor Huzhva is under investigation on extortion charges. After failing to appear for questioning at the prosecution office and court, the judicial authorities put him on the wanted list. No extradition writs were issued.

On **6 March** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern about attacks on at least three media workers by riot police, despite clearly identifying themselves as journalists fulfilling their professional activity in Kyiv. According to reports, a police officer sprayed tear gas in the face of Radio Liberty correspondent Serhiy Nuzhnenko, forcing him to seek urgent medical assistance. Journalists Bohdan Kutepov from “Hromadske” online channel and Vlad Krasynskyi from the Insider news website were also physically and verbally attacked by police.

I also addressed the arson attack on the offices of the Chetverta Vlada investigative news website in the city of Rivne. The fire destroyed a portion of the outlet’s premises. At the time of the attack, four people, including one child, were in the office. Fortunately, nobody was injured. The attack came several days after reports that the servers hosting the Chetverta Vlada website were stolen, incapacitating the outlet’s online work.

I called on the authorities to conduct a swift and thorough investigation into these incidents.

On 8 May I received a reply from the authorities indicating that the attack on journalist Serhiy Nuzhnenko is under police investigation given possible violation of his journalistic activity. The reports covering the attacks on the other journalists are under consideration.

I was also informed that the arson attack on Chetverta Vlada website is being investigated by police.

On **6 March** I wrote to Pavlo Klimkin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, on the situation of Vesti Media Holding (VMH) staff who have been blocked from accessing their office and using newsroom equipment in Kyiv since 8 February.

I expressed concern about reports that law enforcement have effectively obstructed the work of journalists from the four media outlets owned by the VMH: Radio Vesti, Vesti daily, and news websites Vesti-Ukr.com and Ubr.ua.

I informed the Minister that on 23 February, upon request, my staff met with Ms Olga Semchenko, Head of VMH.

I asked that the authorities clarify the reasons behind the seizure of VMH premises and equipment, and to ensure that journalists be able to resume their work in an unhindered manner.

On 8 May I received a reply from the authorities indicating that the actions by law enforcement are based on a court decision and part of an ongoing corruption investigation of “Unison Group Ltd.”, which owns the building where VMH has its premises.

On **7 March** I issued a public statement welcoming the decision by the Supreme Court to review the case of Igor Efimov, a photojournalist from the newspaper Vechirni Cherkasy. Previously, a court decided to acquit the police officer suspected of attacking Efimov.

On **9 March** I wrote to the authorities expressing concern about an unwarranted attempt, allegedly by law enforcement officers, to detain Fikret Huseynli, a journalist contributing to online channel Turan TV, at his apartment in Kyiv. Reportedly, the journalist escaped, but was attacked and injured.

On 8 May I received a reply from the authorities indicating that no police record of the attack exists.

On **19 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that Natalia Goncharova, journalist for Russian channel Rossiya-24 was deported from the country. As in previous cases, I recalled that the authorities should not deport journalists from other OSCE participating States.

On **16 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, on the 3rd anniversary of the murder of Oles Buzina, I reiterated my call for a full investigation and prosecution of his killers and masterminds of the crime.

On **18 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I noted that Fikret Huseynli returned to the Netherlands and welcomed the authorities' decision not to extradite him to Azerbaijan.

On **10 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I condemned the attempted arson on the premises of Inter TV channel in Kyiv. I noted that damage and injuries were prevented by swift police action.

On **15 May** I issued a public statement and wrote a letter to Minister for Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin, raising concern about a raid by security services against Russian state news agency RIA Novosti in Kyiv as well as the searches of homes of journalists and the arrest of Bureau Chief of RIA Novosti Ukraine, Kirill Vyshinsky, and others.

On **21 May** I wrote to the authorities regarding a statement on Twitter by Dmytro Zolotukhin, the Deputy Minister of Information Policy of Ukraine, in reaction to my public statement of 15 May. In his post the Deputy Minister alleged that I tolerate the annexation of Crimea.

I said the annexation of Crimea is not recognized by the OSCE, and expressed concern about the blatant and ungrounded accusation and asked the authorities to prevent such accusations in the future.

On **25 May** I issued a public statement following a decision by the authorities to include the information agencies RIA Novosti Ukraine and Rossiya Segodnya on a sanctions list. The sanctions provide for the blocking of assets, limiting or terminating provision of telecommunications services and the use of telecommunication networks, and the blocking of websites (see Report to the Permanent Council of 26 November 2015 and 27 November 2014).

On **29 May**, following official reports about the murder of well-known Russian journalist and writer, Arkadiy Babchenko, in Kyiv, I issued a public statement strongly condemning the horrific criminal act. I called on the authorities to swiftly and thoroughly investigate the circumstances of his assassination and to bring the perpetrators and those who ordered it to justice.

On 30 May I learned that the journalist was alive and well and that the murder was staged as part of a special operation.

On **30 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my relief that Arkadiy Babchenko is alive, but deplored the decision to spread false information on the life of a journalist as it is the duty of the state to provide correct information to the public.

On **31 May** I replied to a letter from authorities received that same day expressing their disagreement with my statement on Babchenko's case. Given that the lives of journalists are often at risk in the OSCE region, I stressed that the credibility of information provided by the authorities is of utmost importance for the safety of journalists and in the fight against impunity for crimes against them.

On **1 June**, one year after the illegal detention of Stanislav Aseev, a blogger and contributor to the Ukrainian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, I issued a public statement

reiterating my call for the journalist's release (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

On **5 June** I issued a public statement and wrote to the authorities reiterating my concern about the safety of journalists in Ukraine following the accusations against journalist Miroslava Gongadze and Chair of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine Sergiy Tomilenko by the Spokesperson of the General Prosecutor of Ukraine.

On **12 June** I wrote a reply to a letter from Pavlo Klimkin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 31 May in which he raised his concern about Ukrainian citizens imprisoned by the Russian Federation. I said that, within the scope of my Mandate, the cases of Ukrainian journalists Roman Sushchenko, Nikolay Semena and Stanislav Aseev, as well as the case of writer and film director Oleg Sentsov, have been at the top of my agenda. On various occasions I raised their cases publicly, calling on the Russian authorities for their unconditional and immediate release.

I also said that the continued detention of Ukrainian journalists by the Russian Federation creates a strong chilling effect for those who have the right to express their views and opinions freely, and that I will do everything in my power to continue engaging with and urging the relevant actors to release all imprisoned media workers.

On **13 June** I replied to a 6 June letter from Iryna Herashchenko, the First Deputy Chairperson of Verkhovna Rada, regarding the deterioration of media freedom and safety of journalists in areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government. I said that my Office continues to closely monitor the media freedom situation in Crimea and the conflict-affected parts of eastern Ukraine. Along with my predecessor, Dunja Mijatovic, I repeatedly expressed concern about media freedom violations in these areas, particularly highlighting attacks on journalists and media outlets, as well as the blocking of Ukrainian broadcast channels and their illegal replacement with state broadcasts from the Russian Federation.

On **26 June**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed regret that journalists working for Russian media, Evgeny Primakov and Paula Slier, were reportedly denied entry to Ukraine. I reiterated that all OSCE participating States should facilitate free travel for journalists across the region.

On 28 June I learned that the court changed the terms of detention for journalist Vasiliy Muravitskiy to house arrest for two months. Vasiliy has been in detention since August 2017 on various charges, including high treason, encroachment on territorial integrity, incitement of enmity and hatred and participation in a terrorist organization (see Report to the Permanent Council of 9 November 2017).

### **United Kingdom**

On **1 December** I released a public statement following an official visit to the United Kingdom during which I discussed the state of freedom of expression and media freedom in the United Kingdom with, amongst others: Minister of Justice, David Lidington; Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon; member of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, Joanna Cherry; member of the House of Lords Communications Committee, Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Digital Culture, Media and Sport, Damian Collins. I also met

with senior officials of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, OFCOM, the UK's communications regulator as well as with senior NGO representatives, leading scholars and practitioners, and attended the NGO ARTICLE 19's 30th anniversary celebrations on 30 November 2017.

On **26 April**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I recalled the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the killing of British journalist Jill Dando. I noted that the perpetrator(s) of her murder have still not been brought to justice and that there must be accountability for all attacks on journalists.

### **United States**

On **14 November** I sent a letter to the United States' authorities requesting more information regarding the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), in particular the decision to force Russian broadcaster "RT America" to register as a foreign media outlet. I requested more information on the reasons behind the decision and how it will impact on the media outlet's ability to work and report in the country.

On **16 November** I sent a letter to the authorities and issued a public statement expressing my concern regarding the adoption of measures by the United States and Russian Federation requiring media entities from other countries to register themselves as "foreign agents", in particular the Russian broadcaster RT, in the United States under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). I called on both the United States and Russian Federation to reconsider and refrain from requiring media entities to register as "foreign agents" and not take further steps.

(See Russian Federation under Issues raised with participating States)

On **30 November**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I indicated my concern about the decision to revoke RT's accreditation to US Congress, as it showed that the "foreign agent" registration of media has a direct impact on media freedom.

On **5 December** I issued a public statement and a statement from my official Twitter account expressing my concern about the proposal by the United States' Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to repeal existing provisions ensuring net neutrality, the principle that Internet providers must treat all online traffic equally and without undue interference.

On **15 December** I issued a public statement expressing my concern at the decision of the FCC on 14 December to repeal existing provisions ensuring net neutrality. I stated that the decision threatens online media freedom and media pluralism, and will have global spill-over effects.

On **15 and 17 March**, I issued public statements following a visit to New York. During the visit I met with Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, Ana Maria Menéndez, Under-Secretary General, Coordinator on Safety of Journalists, and Marie-Paule Roudil, Director of the UNESCO Liaison Office at the UN Headquarters.

I also participated in a panel on Safety of Female Journalists at the United Nations Headquarters and held meetings with representatives of a number of civil society organisations on such issues as the protection of sources of journalists, border controls of



journalists, access to information, net neutrality and responsibilities of Internet intermediaries. These organisations included: the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters without Borders, ARTICLE 19, Access Now, Pen America and Pen International, IFEX, Human Rights Watch, the American Civil Liberties Union, Open Society Foundations, the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Association for Progressive Communications, as well as the Knight First Amendment Institute and Columbia Global Freedom of Expression at Columbia University.

On **17 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the US Senate vote in favour of overturning the FCC decision to repeal Net Neutrality. I noted that a free and open Internet is crucial for Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom.

On **23 May**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I expressed my concern about reports that Associated Press reporter Ellen Knickmeyer was physically taken out of an Environmental Protection Agency meeting.

On **6 June** I issued a public statement condemning the murder of journalist Zachary Stoner, who was fatally shot on 30 May. Prior to his death the journalists had apparently received threats for work, his home had been broken into and his equipment was stolen. I urged the authorities to launch a thorough investigation.

On **22 June** I released a public statement following my official visit to the United States to discuss freedom of expression and media freedom in the US and the OSCE region. In the course of my visit, I met with several members of the Helsinki Congressional Commission, including Senator Benjamin Cardin and Representative Alcee Hastings. At the State Department, I met with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Elizabeth I Millard and Acting Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Michael Kozak. I also met with senior staff from the House Freedom of the Press Caucus, and with officials at the Department of Justice. I also met with the representatives of leading civil society organizations working on media freedom issues, namely: Committee to Protect Journalists, ARTICLE 19, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Reporters without Borders (RSF), Access Now, Freedom House, Internews and the Wilson Center.

During my exchanges with state officials and civil society representatives I underlined that due to its historical commitment to free speech and press freedom enshrined in the Constitution, the US must continue to play a leading role in promoting media freedom in the OSCE region and domestically and I discussed some of the most pressing concerns concerning United States' legislation, policies and practices concerning: the safety of journalists during protests and public events; the protection of journalistic sources; electronic device searches of journalists at borders; the recent decision of the Federal Communications Commission to revoke the rules on net neutrality; approaches to the regulation of social media platforms; and the impact of the Foreign Agents Registration Act upon the media.

On **29 June** I released a public statement expressing my shock and strong condemnation of the shooting at the Capital Gazette newspaper office in Annapolis, Maryland in the United States of America. During the targeted attack on the newspaper, five people, including four journalists and one staff member, were killed. I expressed my solidarity with the Capital Gazette staff and the entire media community in the USA and also welcomed the swift response by the authorities to investigate the incident.

## **Uzbekistan**

On **13 December** I wrote to the authorities reiterating my call for the release of journalists Dilmurod Saiid, Jusuf Ruzimurodov, Bobomurod Abdullaev and Khayot (Khan) Nasreddinov.

On **5 February** I issued a public statement welcoming the release of journalist Dilmurod Saiid as an important step forward for the media situation in Uzbekistan. I also called on the authorities to release all journalists who remain behind bars, including Yusuf Ruzimurodov, Bobomurod Abdullaev, Gayrat Mikhliboev and Khayot (Khan) Nasreddinov.

On **2 March** I released a public statement welcoming the release of Jusuf Ruzimurodov after 19 years of imprisonment. I welcomed this as a positive step towards the liberation of all journalists in Uzbekistan and called for the release of Bobomurod Abdullaev, Gayrat Mikhliboev and Khayotkhan (Khan) Nasreddinov.

On **22 March** I issued a public statement and welcomed the release of Gayrat Mikhliboev, who has spent 15 years in prison following a 2003 conviction and sentence of seven years imprisonment, and called upon the authorities to free Bobomurod Abdullaev and Khayotkhan (Khan) Nasreddinov.

On **22 March**, in a statement from my official Twitter account, I welcomed the release of Gayrat Mikhliboev.

On **7 May** I issued a public statement to welcome the release of Bobomurod Abdullaev and Khayotkhan Nasreddinov, which I had been informed of by the authorities in advance. In my statement I underlined that their release is a very important and eagerly awaited development. I called on the authorities to drop all remaining charges against them.

## **Projects and activities since the last report**

### **Legal reviews**

#### **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

On **9 February** I wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Dimitrov and Minister of Information Society and Administration Damjan Mancevski to present the second legal review of the draft law amending the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services prepared by Prof. Dr. Katrin Nyman-Metcalf a renowned international expert in communications law.

I welcomed the actions taken by the media community, civil society and non-governmental organizations to engage in public consultations on the draft Law, adding that it is of extreme importance that the process be open for comments from all relevant stakeholders.

#### **Malta**

On **21 November** I presented a legal analysis to Minister of Justice, Culture and Local Government Owen Bonnici, on the draft law of the Republic of Malta “to provide for the

updating of the regulation of media and defamation matters and for matters consequential or ancillary thereto”.

The analysis, commissioned by my Office and authored by legal expert Joan Barata Mir, welcomed several new elements, including the de-criminalization of certain offences related to journalists’ and media activities, as well as the provisions regarding the introduction of limits to libel civil liability, alongside the responsibility of web editors. The text also listed several recommendations to ensure that the new law would reflect related international standards and OSCE commitments.

On **24 January** I presented a brief legal analysis of a note sent to my Office by the authorities on 8 January concerning the recommendations from the legal analysis commissioned by my Office in November.

The analysis welcomed the fact that some of the recommendations of the November analysis had been taken on board in the latest draft law. More specifically, it supported the new definitions of “editor” and “publisher”, the introduction of a general concept of media, the replacement of the notion of “printed matter” with “written media”, the introduction of the defence of truth in public interest cases, as well as the introduction of the condition of harm to a living person’s reputation in the article about defamation of deceased persons.

At the same time, the analysis identified a number of areas where the recommendations of the November Analysis had not been taken on board. It acknowledged the reasons given by the Maltese authorities for the requirement to have legal capacity for editorship of a newspaper and their responses regarding the proposals to have a more defined procedure for the appointment of the Media Register and on the simplification of registration requirements.

The legal analysis emphasized that the November analysis recommended further parameters on the power of the Minister to issue regulations concerning actions to be taken by the operator of a website following notice of a complaint in order to reflect the need to balance the possible defamatory nature of a statement and the public statement and the public interest in its publication.

## **Moldova**

On **11 June** I wrote to Andrian Candu, the Chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, following his request of 25 April to provide a legal review of the draft Code of Audiovisual Media Services.

The analysis recommends broadening the stated aims so as to effectively reflect the objective of the Code, specifically establishing a complete and comprehensive regulation applicable to the provision of audio visual media services in Moldova, including the mission and organization of public service media and the role of the Audiovisual Council, as the independent regulatory authority of the sector.

It further recommends:

- improving the purpose and scope of the Code in order to provide legal certainty vis-à-vis the services that are actually included or excluded, particularly in the area of certain online services;

- amending provisions on local and minority language programmes in order to grant proper protection to minority languages in the Moldovan audio visual sector;
- incorporating the case law of the European Court of Human Rights regarding hate and extremist speech in order to allow only those limitations vis-à-vis expressions that incite or justify violence, discrimination, xenophobia or any other form of intolerance.

The analysis also contains a series of recommendations regarding the establishment of a more proportionate and clear licensing system, a more comprehensive regulation of community media, as well as better nomination and appointment procedures regarding public service media managerial and supervisory posts, along with members of the independent regulatory authority.

### **Russian Federation**

On **25 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to a letter of 12 January requesting “information on the OSCE groundwork and best practices in the sphere of countering the spread of extremist and terrorist propaganda through mass-media and on the Internet, including provisions to temporarily block the sources, which refuse to react on requests of the competent authorities to delete the relevant content as provided by national legislation.”

My Office prepared a report examining the issue from a legal perspective to outline the possibilities and limits of regulatory measures countering extremist and terrorist propaganda. The report shows that blocking measures can only be compatible with international standards on freedom of expression in very exceptional circumstances, if they are provided by law and a court has determined that a particular measure is both necessary and proportionate to protect a legitimate aim, such as national security or public order. It also underlines that, given the permanent evolution of the Internet, existing regulatory practices should be reviewed regularly regarding their respect of the above-mentioned principles, with evaluation mechanisms of implementation established by law, in order to ensure that the authorities, the legislator and civil society will be able to verify regularly that the legislation in place doesn’t go beyond defined legitimate aims such as the fight against extremism and terrorist propaganda, and that human rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of the media, are properly protected.

### **Turkey**

On **27 February** I presented a legal analysis of the Miscellaneous Bill to Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül. The analysis, conducted by Professor Yaman Akdeniz, an internationally renowned expert on Internet freedom, examined elements of the Bill that could restrict online broadcasting and further limit media pluralism in the country.

I noted that the goal of the analysis was to provide a detailed expert review for the authorities, including Members of Parliament ahead of the General Assembly debate on the Bill. I warned that, according to the analysis, Article 73 of the Miscellaneous Bill, which would become Article 29/A of Law 6112 titled “Presentation of Media Services via Internet”, could restrict online broadcasting and limit content pluralism online. It is also questionable whether the Bill is compatible with international treaties. I expressed hope that the Members of Parliament would consider the recommendations of the analysis.

## **Turkmenistan**

On **23 February** I wrote to the authorities to present a commentary on the national law “On Television and Radio Broadcasting” of Turkmenistan adopted on 5 January.

The legal review was conducted by Elena Sherstoboeva, an Associate Professor with the Media Department of the Higher School of Economics in the Russian Federation. The review points out that the law upholds a number of commitments of Turkmenistan in the field of media freedom, but that there are several provisions that require additional improvement and clarification to meet international standards on the independence of broadcast media. These provisions include the independence of the licensing agency and that of the public service broadcaster.

## **Ukraine**

On **18 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to the official presentation of a legal brief on the legal circumstances of the release of journalists in Spain following an international Red Notice issued by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

The brief points to a number of elements of the Spanish legal system which combines judicial and administrative aspects, which set certain standards for allowing dismissal of an extradition request.

This procedure also allows the Government the possibility to decide on the extradition including to dismiss the extradition decision adopted by a competent court based on a set of certain criteria, such as specific national interests.

I said that I trust the brief would assist the competent authorities of Ukraine protect foreign journalists facing a threat of extradition from Ukraine and likely punishment for their professional work.

On **30 January** I wrote to the authorities in reply to the official request by the Ministry of Information Policy presenting the Comparative Legal Analysis of Ukrainian Regulation of Hate Speech in the Media

The analysis indicates that, when it comes to protection for freedom of expression in Ukraine, the constitutional test for restrictions on different rights is largely in line with international standards. However, restrictions are allowed if “in the interests of” the protection of various values, rather than the far more stringent international standard which requires restrictions be “necessary” for the protection of values listed.

The analysis offers a number of recommendations that would ensure compliance of the Ukrainian legislation with OSCE media freedom commitments and international standards.

## **Uzbekistan**

In **June** the Office contributed to a legal review of Uzbekistan's draft law “On Countering Extremism” with an analysis of those provisions affecting media freedom. This review contributed to broad consolidated feedback on the draft law from OSCE, TNTD, ODIHR and

RFOM. The analysis yielded several recommendations and further assistance of the Office to the Uzbekistan authorities.

### **South East Europe**

On **8 June** I shared a legal analysis concerning the regulation of online content in South East Europe, with the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The objective of this non-paper is to contribute to the debate on the issue of Internet regulation, and to enhance regional cooperation in South East Europe by involving OSCE participating States, media professionals, civil society and all other stakeholders ahead of the adoption of new policies. I expressed my belief that a common approach to this issue will help the countries in the region ensure that their country legislation is in line with the best international standards and practices. The online space can only fulfil its potential for creativity, exchange of information and economic growth if it remains open, free and interconnected.

### **Publications**

On **3 May**, at the UNESCO conference marking World Press Freedom Day, I issued the 2018 Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression, together with his counterparts from other intergovernmental organizations - the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye; the Organization of American States' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza; and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Lawrence Mute. The 2018 Joint Declaration focuses on "Media Independence and Diversity in the Digital Age."

The full text of the Joint Declaration is available at <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/379351>

On **14 June** my Office published "Open Journalism: The Road Travelled and the Road Ahead" in English.

The publication is available at <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/384432>

### **Visits and participation in events**

On **13 - 14 November** I paid an official visit to **Skopje** to discuss various media related topics including changes to the legislation on audio-visual media, public service media reform and the safety of journalists. During my visit I met with various media representatives, the Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov, the Speaker of Parliament Talat Xhaferi, the Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski, the Minister for Information Society and Administration Damjan Mancevski, and the Minister without portfolio in charge of communications, accountability and transparency Robert Popovski.

On **16 - 17 November** I spoke at a symposium on media freedom "Power Shifts: Media Freedom and the Internet" in **Berlin**. The event was organized by the Forum for Media and Development (Forum Medien und Entwicklung), a network of institutions and individuals

active in the field of media development cooperation. During my visit I also met with President of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Kurt Beck, to discuss future co-operation.

On **17 November** my Office spoke about national strategies for journalists' security in digital era at the conference Agenda for Change: Developing Media in the Digital Age in Belgrade.

On **17 November** my Office spoke about the safety of female journalists and gender and journalism at the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) congress, hosted by AEJ, the Foreign Ministry of Lithuania and EIGE in **Vilnius**.

On **20 November** I attended the 12th Media Forum of young journalists, "Dialogue of Cultures" in **St. Petersburg**, organized by the Russian Union of Journalists. I also met with many journalists and media civil society actors.

On **21 November** I paid an official visit to the Russian Federation. In **Moscow** I met with Vice-Minister of Telecommunications and Mass Communications, Director of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chair of the Committee of the Federal Council on Information Policy and Co-operation with the Media, Chair of the Committee of the State Duma on Information Policy, Information Technologies and Communication, and Chair of the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights as well as many journalists and media civil society actors.

On **27 November** my Office spoke about media sustainability at the South East Europe Media Forum organized by the Southeast Europe Media Organization in **Sofia**.

On **29 November – 1 December** I conducted an official visit to the United Kingdom during which I discussed the state of freedom of expression and media freedom in the United Kingdom with, amongst others: Minister of Justice, David Lidington; Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon; member of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, Joanna Cherry; member of the House of Lords Communications Committee, Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Digital Culture, Media and Sport, Damian Collins.

I also met with senior officials of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, OFCOM, the UK's communications regulator as well as with senior NGO representatives, leading scholars and practitioners, and attended the NGO ARTICLE 19's 30th anniversary celebrations on 30 November 2017 in **London**.

On **30 November** my Office attended ARTICLE 19's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and the launch of ARTICLE 19's Expression Agenda strategy, which aims to address current and future trends in the field, in **London**.

On **30 November – 1 December** my Office participated in the 14th German-Russian Media Forum, "In the jungle of the truth: Filter bubbles and echo chambers vs. constructive discourse" in **Stavropol**, Russia.

On **6 December** I gave the closing remarks at the 2017 OSCE Civil Society Forum, hosted by the Austrian Chairmanship in **Vienna**.

On **12 - 14 December** I paid an official visit to Sweden. In **Stockholm** I met with Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström, Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke, Hans Dahlgren, State Secretary for International and EU Affairs to Prime Minister and senior management of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

During my visit, I also met with media professionals, representatives of journalists' associations, Civil Rights Defenders, Public Press Ombudsman Ola Sigvardsson and the Chief Executive of public service broadcaster Sveriges Television Hanna Stjärne.

On **18 - 22 December** the Office co-organised a study tour for international journalism students and trainers from Turkmenistan to **Vienna**, including visits to the University of Vienna, the public service broadcaster ORF, community broadcaster Radio Orange and the daily Der Standard.

On **20 January** I gave a speech on press freedom in Europe at the annual conference of the German Union of Journalists and met with the Secretary General in **Berlin**.

On **22 January** I met with Audray Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, in **Paris** to discuss various media freedom issues and to prepare for the Annual UNESCO media freedom conference in Ghana in May.

On **24 January** I visited ODIHR in **Warsaw** to meet with Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttir and several members of ODIHR staff, to discuss issues regarding cooperation between RFoM and ODIHR.

On **5 - 6 February** I visited Montenegro to get first-hand information on the media freedom situation in the country. During my visit I met with representatives of the media community, Prime Minister Duško Marković, Minister of Foreign Affairs Srđan Darmanović, and Minister of Culture Aleksandar Bogdanović in **Podgorica** to discuss most important media issues including the safety of journalists, the independence of the Public Service Broadcaster RTCG, self-regulation of the media and support to professional standards.

On **12 - 13 February** I paid an official visit to Albania and met with Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Media Committee and members from the media community in **Tirana**. We had in-depth discussions on promoting a strong and pluralist media landscape, respect for the independence of journalists, the protection of the economic and social status of journalists and the reform of the public service broadcaster RTSH.

On **15 February** I gave the keynote address at the conference "Free European Media," organised by the European Federation of Journalists and held in the European Solidarity Centre in **Gdansk**.

On **26 - 28 February** I conducted an official visit to Canada where I met with high level state officials and attended a conference on Internet jurisdiction in **Ottawa**.

During the visit I met with representatives of the Global Affairs Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage, Justice Canada, Public Safety Canada, the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada, the Royal Canadian



Mounted Police and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

On **27 February** my Office participated in the Colloquium on Fake News, organized by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks Content and Technology in **Brussels**.

On **2 March**, following the assassination of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, I travelled to **Bratislava** to meet with Prime Minister Robert Fico to discuss the case and the safety of journalists in the country. I also discussed the case with the Reporters Without Borders Secretary General Christophe Deloire and Flutura Kusari of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom.

On **2 March** my Office participated in a public discussion on threats to freedom of expression in **Kyiv**, organized by the National Union of the Journalists of Ukraine and the International Federation of Journalists.

On **5 - 6 March** I gave a keynote speech at the Media against Hate conference, organized by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) in **Brussels**. Media against Hate is a Europe-wide campaign initiated by the EFJ and a coalition of civil society organizations, aiming at countering hate speech and discrimination in the media.

On **12 - 16 March** I travelled to **New York** to meet with senior United Nations officials and representatives of civil society to discuss the protection of journalists. I also spoke at an event, "Dangerous Assignments: Safety of women journalists", hosted by CPJ and the Permanent Missions of Greece, France and Lithuania to the UN on the side-lines of the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

On **16 March** my Office spoke at a panel hosted by the International Association of Women in Radio and Television and GenderLinks, "#MeToo Online:Workshopping solutions to Counter Cyber Violence Against Women" in **New York City**.

On **20 - 22 March** I visited **Kyiv** to speak at an event organized by the embassies of several States to celebrate 'Semaine de la Francophonie.' At the event, the role of cartoonists was discussed, with several cartoonists from Ukraine, France, Switzerland and Belgium in attendance. During my visit I also met representatives of the media at the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, and students from the Kyiv Institute for International Relations (KIMO).

On **23 March** I spoke at a conference, organized by the International University Campus Paris, on democracy and digital threats and issues in **Paris**.

On **26 March** my Office participated at the UNESCO informational meeting in **Paris** on a "Review of developments in the situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)," at the invitation of Director General Audrey Azoulay.

On **5 April** I spoke at an international conference, organized by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at a seminar on manipulation of information in **Paris**. I visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet with the Secretary-General and other diplomats.

I also visited the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA, national media regulator) to meet with Nicolas Curien, acting President and Sylvie Pierre-Brossolette, member of the CSA, to discuss regulatory issues pertaining to media freedom.

On **5 April** my Office spoke on challenges to trust and truth in public debate and the safety of female journalists at the third International Media Law, Policy & Practice (IMLPP) conference at the University of **Amsterdam**.

On **5 - 6 April** my Office spoke at the National Seminar on Countering the Use of Internet for Terrorist Purposes in **Ashgabat**.

On **9 - 11 April** I paid an official visit to Serbia. During my visit I met with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić, State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture Aleksandar Gajović, journalists' associations, media experts, non-governmental organizations and investigative journalists in **Belgrade**. We discussed the issue of safety of journalists, combating impunity, media pluralism and the new media strategy in the country. During the visit, I attended a memorial marking the 19th anniversary of the murder of prominent journalist Slavko Ćuruvija.

On **9 - 13 April** my Office participated as judge at 11<sup>th</sup> Annual International Rounds of the Monroe E Price Media Law Moot Court Competition at the University of **Oxford**.

On **16 April** my Office spoke on a panel on gender-based violence online at the **Stockholm** Forum on Gender Equality, hosted by the Swedish Institute, Government of Sweden and SIDA.

On **18 - 20 April** I conducted an official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina where I met with Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak, Minister of Human Rights and Refugees Semiha Borovac, Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, Borislav Bojić, and Deputy Minister for Transport and Communications Saša Dalipagić as well as various media actors in **Sarajevo**. The main discussions focused on the issues of safety of journalists, transparency of media ownership, working conditions for journalists and the state of the public service broadcasting system.

On **19 - 20 April** my Office spoke at the Inter-regional Conference on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism in **Seoul**.

On **23 April** I met with Ferdinand Grapperhaus, Minister of Justice of the Netherlands, in **Vienna** to discuss media freedom issues, in particular questions on the issues of hate speech and safety of journalists.

On **24 - 25 April** my Office spoke about the comprehensive approach to cybersecurity and internet regulation, and on the protection of the right to freedom of expression when addressing challenges of "fake news" as a perceived threat to critical infrastructure, at the International Critical Infrastructure Protection Forum, organised by Romanian Council of the European Union Presidency 2019, in **Bucharest**.

On **24 - 26 April** I visited **Oslo** where I met with Trine Skei Grande, Minister of Culture, and media representatives including from the fact-checking website Faktisk.no, representatives of

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Siv Mossleth, Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation and Mari Velsand, President of Medietilsynet, the national media regulatory institution. I also gave a speech at the launch of the 2018 Reporters without Borders report.

On **25 - 26 April** my Office participated in the panel “Global Milestones and Challenges” and spoke about the regulation of disinformation at the “Justice for Freedom of Expression” conference at Columbia University in **New York**.

On **2 - 3 May** I travelled to **Accra**, Ghana to attend the UNESCO conference marking World Press Freedom Day 2018, “Keeping Power in Check: Media Justice and the Rule of Law”. During the event I launched the 2018 Joint Declaration (see Publications).

On **3 May** my Office spoke about the media freedom situation in Turkey at a conference organized by the European Parliament and the European Commission in **Brussels**. The Conference was opened by the President of the Parliament Antonio Tajani and closed by the Commissioner Johannes Hahn

On **9 May** I travelled to **Podgorica** following the shooting of journalist Olivera Lakić the previous day. In Podgorica I visited the journalist in hospital, met with the management and the staff of the newspaper Vijesti where she works and met with the Foreign Minister Srđan Darmanović to discuss the authorities’ response to the attack on the journalist.

On **16 May** my Office spoke at a conference in **Sofia**, “Media Freedom and Pluralism: How to Re-boot an Essential EU Pillar”, organized by the European Newspaper Publishers’ Association, European Magazine Media Association, the Bulgarian Union of Publishers, Reporters Sans Frontières, the European Federation of Journalists, the Association of European Journalists, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom and the South East Europe Media Association.

On **16 May** my Office attended the public lecture of Adam Liptak, the Supreme Court correspondent of the New York Times, at the Central European University in **Budapest**.

On **16 - 17 May** I spoke on panels on combating “fake news” and multi-stakeholder discussions on internet regulation at the RightsCon summit in **Toronto**, organized by AccessNow.

On **16 - 17 May** my Office participated in the international seminar, “Legislation and Self-Regulation of the Media in Russia and the EU: Role of Professional Ethics and Solidarity” for media professionals from Russia and the EU countries at the Yeltsin-Centre in **Yekaterinburg**, the Russian Federation.

On **17 - 18 May** my Office participated in a conference on Internet freedom and development in the countries of Central Asia in **Almaty**, organized by the NGO Media Net, with the support of the OSCE Programme Office in Astana and Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

On **18 May** my Office participated in the international workshop “Media Systems under Pressure: Recent Developments in Media Freedom in Central and Eastern Europe” in **Amsterdam**.

On **22 May** my Office spoke at a panel discussion on media freedom in Europe organized by the University of **Vienna**.

On **22 - 23 May** my Office participated in the International Conference on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in **Vienna**.

On **22 - 24 May** I travelled to **Almaty** to attend 15th Eurasian Media Forum, where I spoke on panels on the evolution of information technology and evolution of mass media. During the event I met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Minister of Information and Communications Dauren Abayev, and Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Dr. Dariga Nazarbayeva to discuss media freedom issues in Kazakhstan.

On **23 - 25 May** my Office spoke at the 47<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities in **Luxembourg City**.

On **1 June** my Office participated in the annual Civic Solidarity Platform Stakeholders Meeting in **Vienna**.

On **11 - 12 June** my Office spoke at an international conference on “The role of Youth in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism” in **Tashkent** and **Samarkand**.

On **14 June 2018** the Office participated in the International Workshop "Cooperation of special and law enforcement agencies with media and international organisations" in **Warsaw**. The Office presented the position of the RFOM in a presentation on “finding the balance: legitimacy of the limitations on media outlet activities due to national security considerations and emergency situations”.

On **14 - 15 June** I gave the keynote address at an inter-parliamentary conference “Upholding freedom of expression, including media freedom in the EU and beyond”, organized by the European Parliament and the Chamber of Deputies in the Parliament of the Czech Republic in **Prague**.

On **16 June** my Office marched for freedom of expression for all, with the “Diplomats for Equality” at the **Vienna** Pride parade.

On **18 - 21 June** I conducted an official visit to the United States to discuss the freedom of expression and media freedom in the United States and the OSCE region. In the course of my visit, I met with several members of the Helsinki Commission. At the State Department, I met with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and Acting Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. I also met with senior staff from the House Freedom of the Press Caucus, and with officials at the Department of Justice. I also met with the representatives of leading civil society organizations working on media freedom issues.

On **20 June** my Office spoke at the 22nd Summer Academy on OSCE, organised by the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, in **Vienna**.

On **28 - 29 June** my Office spoke at a Central Asian Regional Workshop on “Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes” in **Almaty**.

## **Conferences and Projects**

### **20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media**

At the end of 2017 my Office implemented several activities to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, including an information campaign in social media and a reception on **9 November** at the French Embassy in **Vienna**. During the reception, two former OSCE Representatives on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović and Miklós Haraszti gave speeches and a letter from Freimut Duve, the first Representative, was read to the 90 participants from OSCE participating States, the Secretariat, Institutions, Field Operations, media freedom NGOs and civil society who attended.

### **#SOFJO**

On **14 - 15 November** my Office hosted, together with the International Press Institute, a #SOFJO Networking and Training Workshop in **Vienna** on innovative strategies, advocacy and digital security tools to combat gender-based online harassment of journalists for more than 30 participants.

The #SOFJO Campaign concluded its 2017 activities with a panel discussion, exhibition and documentary screening on **18 December** in **Vienna**. The event, hosted by my Office, together with the Permanent Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE, featured presentations by Ambassador Ulrika Funered, Barbara Trionfi of the International Press Institute, and journalists Arzu Geyabullayeva and Jessikka Aro. The work of the project was also showcased in an exhibition that followed the screening of a documentary on online harassment and abuse, produced by my Office and the International Press Institute, *A Dark Place*.

### **Cyprus Media Dialogue**

From **November - December** my Office supported an exchange programme for young Cypriot journalists interested in experiencing and sharing stories of bi-communal life in Cyprus. Through the programme, 14 young journalists (seven from each community) spent five working days at a host media outlet in the neighbouring community. During the exchange, the journalists prepared articles, as well as audio and video reports and took photos to capture their experiences. Their work was published by the journalists’ home media outlets.

From **November - June** my Office supported the production of a trilingual glossary of the most frequently used words and terms in the media that currently impede clarity and understanding between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island. The document was prepared by Cypriot experts with the contribution of the Ethical Journalism Network to be used as a voluntary tool for journalists, editors and anyone engaged in improving quality journalism in Cyprus.

## **Conference on impunity for murders of journalists**

On **11 December** my Office, in cooperation with the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab at the Department of Communication of the University of Vienna, organized an expert conference, *Impunity for murders of journalists: a challenge to freedom of the media in Vienna*.

Approximately 100 journalists, media and legal experts, academics, representatives of OSCE participating States and law enforcement representatives discussed the practical, methodological and ethical aspects of monitoring the deaths of journalists and collecting information on these cases. Ways to improve and amend current practices in the OSCE region to enhance journalists' safety were also discussed.

Based on the presentations and discussions during the event, the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab at the Department of Communication of the University of Vienna prepared a report, available at <https://www.osce.org/fom/368491>.

## **Regional discussion events on safety of journalists in Ukraine**

On **13 December, 14 December, 3 April and 4 April** my Office participated in public discussions and workshops in **Poltava, Cherkassy, Lviv and Lutsk** on ways to improve journalists' safety and professional standards. The events were organized by the National Union of the Journalists of Ukraine with support from my Office and included the participation of a representative from the European Federation of Journalists.

## **Study tour on media self-regulation**

On **22 - 26 January** my Office, together with the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, organized a study tour to **Berlin** for a dozen Ukrainian media experts on media self-regulation. Participants met with key media regulation stakeholders in Germany to discuss how possible solutions to address concrete challenges and practices could be applied in Ukraine.

## **Round table discussion between Ukrainian and Russian journalists' unions**

On **22 February** my Office organized the 17<sup>th</sup> round table discussion for senior representatives of the Russian Union of Journalists and the National Union of the Journalists of Ukraine, led by the Secretary Generals of the two unions, in **Vienna**. Participants discussed the current state of affairs of safety of journalists in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, promoting quality journalism in their respective countries and a number of other common projects and activities.

During the course of the meetings the participants jointly called for the release of Stanislav Aseev, a blogger and contributor to the Ukrainian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty who is detained in Donetsk, and adopted joint memorandums available at [www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/373447](http://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/373447) and [www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/373450](http://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/373450).

## **Workshop for young journalists from Ukraine and Russia**

On **4 - 8 March** my Office, together with the Russian Union of Journalists and the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, organized a small media production workshop in **Vienna** for a group of four young journalists from Ukraine and Russia. The activity is part of an ongoing dialogue between the media communities of the two countries initiated by my Office in 2014. The journalists worked together to complete the production of a joint documentary film that they began work on during a previous workshop in June 2017.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Annual South East Europe Media Conference**

On **10 - 11 May** my Office, together with OSCE Field Operations in South East Europe, hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual South East Europe Media Conference.

The event, opened by Minister without Portfolio in Charge of Communications, Accountability and Transparency Robert Popovski and Deputy Minister of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania Artemis Dralo, gathered over 150 participants in **Struga**, on the shores of Lake Ohrid representing government, civil society, press and media associations, journalist unions, public service media and media professionals from all countries in the region to discuss media freedom issues. The fifth conference followed the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship's "Media Freedom in the Western Balkans" Conference in February 2017, highlighting participants' numerous personal and professional experiences of attacks on the safety of journalists, in particular female journalists, and the often precarious working conditions media workers in the region face. In addition, the conference also delved into issues ranging from Public Service Media, with participants calling for their strengthened independence and financial sustainability, to best practices in the area of media self-regulation, new economic opportunities and challenges, the impact of digitalization on media freedom, and finally the phenomena of "fake news", propaganda and disinformation. The event was closed by Minister of Information Society and Administration Damjan Mancevski.

On the first day of the Conference, participants adopted a declaration condemning the violence against Olivera Lakić, an investigative journalist with the Vijesti newspaper in Montenegro, who was shot the evening of 8 May 2018. The full text of the Declaration can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/380689>

Conference conclusions and recommendations can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/384549>

## **Strengthening media freedom and pluralism in Ukraine during times of conflict in and around the country**

On **26 June** my Office organized an expert conference "Strengthening media freedom and pluralism in Ukraine during times of conflict in and around the country" in **Kyiv**. More than 200 media professionals, government and civil society representatives, inter-governmental officers, renowned international experts and journalists discussed the challenges they face with regards to the media environment in the country, and suggested ways to promote freedom of expression, access to quality information and freedom of the media in Ukraine, in particular in the context of the current conflict.

Five expert panels addressed the following topics: ensuring media diversity and pluralism, countering disinformation and propaganda, safety of journalists, combating “hate speech”, and freedom of artistic expression.

More information on the event can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/381841>

## **Planned activities for the next reporting period**

### **Visits and participation in events**

On **9 July** the Office will participate in the 14th International Media Law School in **Kyiv**, for citizens of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asian countries. The Office will present the position of the RFOM on the issue of false news in the context of freedom of the media.

### **Conferences**

#### **Cyprus Media Dialogue**

On **9 - 11 July** I will host roundtable discussions for heads of the local journalists’ unions and press councils, media experts and journalists in **Nicosia**. I will also meet with country authorities during the visit to discuss press freedom issues on the island and will participate in various events organized by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot journalistic communities.

On **10 July** my Office will organize an exhibition in **Nicosia** of the work produced by young Cypriot journalists as part of an exchange programme supported by my Office in November and December. During the event a trilingual glossary, the production of which was supported by my Office, will be launched.

On **18 - 19 July** my Office will host the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual South Caucasus Media Conference, “Quality Journalism for Trustworthy and Credible Information” in **Tbilisi**.

In **October** my Office will hold the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Central Asia Media Conference in **Almaty** on the Future of Journalism, touching upon regulation of social networks, counter-terrorism and media freedom in the region. The event is expected to attract more than 100 participants from the media community, civil servants, NGOs & academia.

#### **#SOFJO**

In **December**, together with the International Press Institute, my Office will host a roundtable discussion and screening of our original documentary, *A Dark Place*, during the This Human World Film Festival.



## **Publications**

### ***Guidebook on Safety of Journalists***

By the end of the year my Office will publish the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the OSCE *Guidebook on Safety of Journalists* to better assist participating States in their efforts to ensure safe working conditions for journalists in the OSCE region. The *Guidebook*, to be published in English and Russian, will provide a framework of the current situation of safety of journalists and any developments since publication of the previous edition in 2014, including gender-based violence, and harassment and intimidation of journalists online.

### **Extra-budgetary donors**

My thanks go to the governments of Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States for their generous contribution to the work of my Office during this reporting period.

I encourage all participating States to consider supporting my Office's efforts to provide expertise, support and the most up-to-date resources for the promotion and protection of freedom of the media and freedom of expression throughout the OSCE region.