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

**Regular Report to the Permanent Council
For the period from 10 April 2025 – 27 November 2025**

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to present my second report to the Permanent Council as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

This year, under Finland's Chairpersonship, we also mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, a milestone that reminds us that media freedom is not only a fundamental democratic value but also an essential pillar of security.

Since my previous address, I have worked closely with participating States, journalists, and civil society across the OSCE region. These engagements have reconfirmed a fundamental principle at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security: media freedom is not a perk of democracy or a luxury, it is a prerequisite for it. Nor is media freedom a threat to stability, it is a cornerstone of stability.

In my first report, I outlined the complex pressures shaping media freedom; pressures that continue to test our shared vision of democracy and security. Far from easing, these challenges have in many cases intensified. In various instances we observe what might appear to be minor or limited shifts in approaches to media and journalists. Seemingly marginal developments carry with them the danger of "normalization" and if not curtailed, may develop and become a "new normal". This second report, while acknowledging meaningful cooperation and some progress, also carries a note of caution: we are witnessing a significant shift in the media environment, and the choices we make today will determine the resilience of our media and, by extension, our democratic security architecture, for years to come.

Paradigm Shift

We are witnessing a paradigm shift in the information space, one that threatens media freedom, democratic discourse, and our security architecture. The environment in which information is sought, debated, and defended is rapidly being reshaped by political and corporate forces, recalibrating the flow of information to serve narrow interests rather than the public good. The rise of "alternative truth" ecosystems – hyper-partisan outlets, opaque influencer networks, and algorithm-driven platforms amplifying conspiracy and outrage – illustrates how easily the information landscape can be distorted. Online spaces, which contribute to democratizing communication, have also become fertile ground for manipulation, polarization, and disinformation. As American commentator Peggy Noonan recently pointed out, "We are a nation divided by algorithms." She was speaking about the United States of America, but indeed, we are a world community divided by polarising algorithms. As the commentator said, "We are all getting different versions of reality every time we look at a screen, and it is hurting us."

Compounding these challenges is the increasingly common practice by some political figures disparage and smear journalists, an approach that corrodes public confidence in the press and encourages hostility toward those tasked with informing the public. Such rhetoric normalizes a climate in which journalists are dismissed as enemies and potentially targeted for harassment and violence.

Today, this shift is further accelerated by the transformative power of artificial intelligence (AI) and the dominance of global social media platforms. Automated content generation and recommendation algorithms increasingly determine what people see, what they believe, and how they act upon information, often without transparency or accountability. AI-driven systems can both empower and endanger journalism, amplifying credible reporting on one hand, while enabling synthetic manipulation, deepfakes, and targeted disinformation on the other. These technologies are reshaping how narratives are constructed and contested, deepening the crisis of trust across societies.

Recent research¹ coordinated by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and led by the BBC has revealed that generative AI assistants, already in use by millions, routinely misrepresent news content. Of the 3,000 responses analysed from major AI platforms, 45 percent contained significant factual or sourcing errors. This confirms that unverified AI outputs can distort public understanding and ultimately undermine confidence in democracy itself. Not to mention, the immense financial damage that the use of AI by online platforms is causing to the news industry.

Across a growing number of OSCE participating States, we are witnessing a backsliding in media freedom. Economic pressures compound this deterioration: journalism, as a profession, is struggling for survival. Advertising revenue has migrated to digital intermediaries, local outlets are disappearing, and sustainable business models remain elusive. As a result, fewer independent voices are able to hold power to account, leaving citizens more vulnerable to manipulation and less able to access verified, diverse sources of information.

Former OSCE RFoMs saw this coming. They warned that growing concentrations of influence, spreading disinformation, and the weakening of journalistic independence would lead us to this very point. They were right. Today, the threat is no longer emerging; it is upon us.

This moment tests the resilience of our shared OSCE principles and commitments. The polarization of societies is eroding public trust and creating an increasingly confrontational climate in which the media are on the front line. Across the region, East

¹ See: [News Integrity in AI Assistants | EBU](#)

and West of Vienna alike, we have seen how protests have evolved into flashpoints where journalists face harassment, intimidation, and, at times, violence from both state and non-state actors. When the press is treated as an adversary rather than a pillar of accountability, our mutual understanding, social cohesion, and collective security are placed at risk.

I therefore call on participating States to act collectively and decisively, before the space for information, accountability, and public trust withers beyond repair. If we fail to act, we risk losing not only media freedom, but the shared reality that underpins our common security, mutual understanding, and peace.

This report assesses both the risks accelerating across the OSCE region and progress achieved. My Office remains focused on constructive engagement and practical support to safeguard media freedom in principle and in practice. Achieving this requires vigilance and renewed determination to fully comprehend that media freedom underpins all other freedoms inherent in our democratic systems of governance and thus supports our shared security.

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The safety of journalists in the OSCE region is under unprecedented pressure. While numbers on attacks against journalists monitored by different organizations vary substantially, from 124 attacks recorded by the Council of Europe Platform on Safety of Journalists to 428 instances documented by the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) mechanism. In Serbia alone, the Public Prosecution of the Republic of Serbia has documented attacks against 99 journalists so far this year.² These are official figures. This is an extraordinarily high number. What is clear is that the number of incidents is unacceptably high and increasing East and West of Vienna. Journalists also face online harassment, targeted smear campaigns, and, in many cases, unfounded and abusive judicial prosecution for their reporting. The confrontational nature of protests, sometimes combined with inadequate respect for media freedom by law enforcement, has further escalated risks. This deteriorating environment underscores the urgent need for all OSCE participating States to fully implement their commitments under OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on the Safety of Journalists, which reaffirms that the protection of journalists is essential to upholding freedom of expression and democratic governance, and calls on States to bring their laws, policies, and practices into full compliance with these commitments.

² See: <http://www.vrhovnojt.gov.rs/sr/bezbednost-novinarar>

Law Enforcement and the Media

In recent months I have noted with growing concern a disturbing trend: the excessive use of force, intimidation and access restrictions by law-enforcement personnel against journalists covering public protests. Across multiple jurisdictions there are credible, documented instances in which journalists – wearing identifiable press markings (including “Press” vests and accreditation) – and simply carrying out their role of informing the public – have been subjected to pepper spray, rubber bullets, stun grenades, physical assault, arbitrary detention or equipment seizure.

During the reporting period, attacks on journalists by law enforcement during public demonstrations have risen significantly. Reported violations included restricted media access to protest sites, arbitrary detentions and searches, confiscation or destruction of equipment, and verbal abuse. For example, in Serbia, the Committee to Protect Journalists, reported that at least 28 journalists have been attacked by law enforcement during demonstrations, despite wearing “Press” vests and showing credentials.³ In addition, we have received reports of police ignoring attacks against peaceful demonstrators by unknown perpetrators. In addition, we have received reports of police ignoring attacks against peaceful demonstrators by unknown perpetrators. In Georgia, on 8 September, several journalists who were clearly identifiable as press while reporting on protests, were assaulted by supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream party and by a police officer. One reporter was knocked unconscious, while others had their phones seized or were subjected to harassment. Video evidence from the scene shows that police officers either failed to intervene or were themselves somehow involved in the attacks. The events of 8 September are not an isolated occurrence but rather part of a continuing pattern in Georgia, marked by repeated violence against media workers, a lack of police protection, and persistent impunity for those who commit abuses against journalists.⁴ In Türkiye, between May and September 2025, at least five journalists were subjected to aggressive crowd control measures and temporarily detained, while covering protests in Istanbul and Ankara, as documented by the Mapping Media Freedom Platform.⁵ In the United States of America, the US Press Freedom Tracker recorded 86 incidents of targeted attacks this year against journalists by police while covering protests nationwide,⁶ While Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted 60 attacks in Los Angeles alone.⁷ In France, during the reporting period, ARTICLE 19 and RSF have documented police violence against journalists, including instances of journalists being pepper-sprayed, beaten, and detained during public demonstrations in Paris and other cities, although being clearly identifiable as press.⁸ RSF has pointed out that these police

³ See: <https://cpj.org/2025/09/serbia-police-target-journalists-as-anti-government-protests-escalate/>

⁴ See: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/09/11/georgia-journalists-attacks-by-ruling-party-activists-and-police/>

⁵ See: [Mapping Media Freedom - Alert Explorer](https://mappingmediafreedom.org/alert-explorer)

⁶ See: <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/>

⁷ See: [USA: RSF appalled by LAPD's repeated violence against journalists | RSF](#)

⁸ See: <https://www.article19.org/resources/france-new-resurgence-of-police-violence-against-journalists-must-end/>

behaviours are violations of press freedom and they contravene the National Law Enforcement Plan (SMO) from 2021. While such policies are in place across the OSCE region, there appears to be a question of training and follow-up procedures. I remind that provisions regarding this are contained in Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018.

In several participating States, including Germany, the Netherlands, Georgia, and Serbia, my Office has observed incidents where journalists covering public protests were subjected to harassment or violence by protesters. In some cases, law enforcement authorities did not intervene adequately to prevent or stop such attacks. These incidents contribute to a wider climate of hostility towards the media and highlight the need for more consistent and effective protection of journalists by law enforcement as well as public discourse by state and political leaders which shows respect for independent journalism, in line with OSCE commitments on the safety of journalists.

These incidents reflect broader systemic risks for media freedom across the OSCE region. Law enforcement often fails to distinguish journalists from protesters or to adapt tactics to ensure reporter safety. Investigations and accountability are often inadequate, contributing to a climate of impunity. Where journalists are or feel unsafe covering public assemblies, the public's right to information and transparency is undermined. This trend represents a structural challenge to media freedom, human rights, and democratic governance.

Good practices do exist in some jurisdictions. For instance, in Austria the introduction of dedicated Media Contact Officers during demonstrations illustrates how law enforcement bodies can create liaison roles for journalists to support on-site safety. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the PersVeilig initiative created jointly by the police, Public Prosecution Service, and journalist organizations to protect journalists from aggression and threats, serves as a contact point and helpdesk for media professionals, offering support and a way to report incidents so that the authorities can assess the risks and take action. This includes ensuring that threats and violence are taken seriously, with the prosecution service prioritizing cases and seeking higher sentences for crimes against journalists. In Germany, the Saxony police force has a designated unit with special mobile police teams to protect and facilitate the work of media during protests and demonstrations. This special unit consists of a liaison officer, riot police, technical moderators and a police commander who, in co-ordination with other police chiefs and/or upon alert from the media, dispatches the police teams to violent and disruptive public events. As part of an early warning mechanism, the police hold information briefings with the media in advance, to inform them about the upcoming police operations. I also welcome a most recent example from the United Kingdom; as of last month, every police force across the country has a Journalist Safety Liaison Officer, as part of a strengthened partnership between the media, policing and government to improve journalists' safety.

These examples show that liaison mechanisms and trainings aimed at ensuring better understanding between police and journalists can avoid misunderstandings, enhance journalists' safety and facilitate communication during public events. I encourage participating States to follow these good practices and to both appoint police liaison teams as well as to provide adequate training on human rights compliant policing of demonstrations. At the same time, efforts to promote journalist safety must never restrict the journalists' ability to report freely; their sole purpose must be to protect media professionals and uphold their independence, ensuring that safety measures support the public's right to be informed.

In light of this evolving phenomenon, I aim to address this matter specifically through my Office's project on the safety of journalists in the coming months ahead. I urge all OSCE participating States systematically implement their commitments under OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on the Safety of Journalists, which calls on States to ensure that journalists can carry out their work safely and without risk of violence, intimidation, or harassment. This includes creating an enabling environment for journalists to report freely during public demonstrations, taking measures to prevent unlawful interference by law enforcement, and ensuring accountability for any violations that occur. Only through consistent and transparent implementation of these commitments can States guarantee that public assemblies are covered freely and safely, thereby upholding freedom of expression, media pluralism, and the public's right to information across the OSCE region.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

The growing use of SLAPPs targeting journalists and media outlets across the OSCE region remains a central concern of my Office. Research done by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) shows that media outlets are now the most frequent targets of SLAPPs, followed closely by journalists, and that over 91 percent of cases occur entirely within domestic jurisdictions. Journalists' covering corruption, government conduct, business interests and environmental matters are the most commonly targeted. Recent trends reveal that SLAPPs are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Claimants are moving beyond traditional defamation suits and turning to more opaque legal avenues, including the weaponisation of data-protection frameworks, particularly the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the "right to erasure", to pressure journalists to remove public interest information. SLAPPs are also being disguised as copyright, privacy or competition-law claims. These actions are rarely meant to prevail on their merits; rather, they aim to intimidate, silence and financially exhaust their targets, with some claims now seeking damages approaching €45 million. This growing pattern continues to exert a

serious chilling effect on investigative journalism and public-interest reporting across the region⁹.

In my official country visits and in numerous meetings with government authorities, I continue to raise the dangers posed by SLAPPs and advocate for the passage of domestic anti-SLAPPs legislation, in line also with recommendations from the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO. SLAPPs undermine independent journalism, chill public debate, and erode democratic accountability, sending a clear signal that scrutiny of those in power carries personal and financial risk.

The European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe have taken significant steps to counter these abusive lawsuits. The EU has adopted a Directive introducing targeted procedural safeguards in cross-border cases and issued a Recommendation encouraging Member States to extend similar protections to domestic contexts. The Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 on countering the use of SLAPPs provides a comprehensive framework for national implementation, urging States to adopt early-dismissal procedures, sanctions against abusive litigants, and support mechanisms for victims of SLAPPs. In addition, UNESCO has published guidance on the "misuse" of the judicial system to attack freedom of expression, highlighting how SLAPPs often leverage defamation and other legal tools to silence journalists and emphasising the need for legal reform, capacity-building and peer networks for legal professionals.

A notable example within the OSCE region is Malta, where SLAPPs have long posed a serious challenge to independent journalism, which has recently become the first EU Member State to transpose the new EU Anti-SLAPP Directive; however, the Directive applies only to cross-border cases and does not address the far more prevalent domestic SLAPPs. This underscores the need for all participating States to adopt comprehensive national anti-SLAPP legislation to ensure full protection for journalists for cases of domestic vexatious lawsuits.

Other ongoing efforts and good practice examples include the United Kingdom, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 introduced initial anti-SLAPP provisions, and the UK Parliament has debated SLAPP protections and recognised the need for early dismissal mechanisms; in the United States, many states¹⁰ have enacted statutory anti-SLAPP legislation; and in Canada, provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have implemented anti-SLAPP legal frameworks aimed at protecting public interest journalism and free expression. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to align with the commitments in the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 on the

⁹ These are key findings from the CASE 2025 SLAPPs Report which has not yet been published. Their previous report can be found here: [CASE-2024-report-vf compressed-1.pdf](#)

¹⁰ As of June 2025, 38 states and the District of Columbia have anti-SLAPP laws, though the protections vary significantly from state to state. See: [Anti-SLAPP Legal Guide | The Reporters Committee](#)

Safety of Journalists, which calls on participating States to ensure that journalists can work safely and without fear of violence, intimidation, or harassment. The abuse of legal systems through SLAPPs directly contradicts those commitments by fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship.

In meetings with representatives of participating States I have often encouraged them to adopt and implement protection measures, such as early dismissal mechanisms, cost-shifting provisions, and awareness raising initiatives. I would like to reiterate this call to all participating States today Immediate and tangible action is needed to ensure that journalists can report freely and fearlessly, without being targeted by malicious lawsuits intended to silence them.

Surveillance

Over past years, there have been a growing number of reports on the use of advanced surveillance technologies, ranging from invasive spyware to intrusive corporate surveillance. Digital technologies are increasingly deployed for repression and political control, including of journalists and dissident voices. In several contexts, opaque public-private partnerships facilitate such surveillance, while in others Big Tech's pervasive data extraction enables monitoring and manipulation. Both surveillance approaches result in chilling effects and a limitation of journalists' ability to work freely, protect their sources, and contribute to an informed public debate. As stated by my predecessor, Teresa Ribeiro, in her 2023 Communiqué on Surveillance, the intrusive use of spyware stands in direct contradiction to OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom. Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 explicitly calls on participating States to take measures to protect journalists from intimidation and harassment, including through digital technologies, and to ensure that legal frameworks allow them to communicate safely, maintain confidentiality of sources, and report without fear of surveillance.

A striking example is the recent case in Italy, where a prominent Italian investigative journalist was reportedly targeted with the spyware "Graphite" by Paragon Solutions, which can covertly access the most intimate data on a phone. The Italian government denied having used the spyware software against the journalist, as journalists are protected from surveillance by intelligence services under Italian law. The National Cybersecurity Agency launched an investigation into the hacking scandal but has so far been unable to determine who was responsible for the surveillance. This is but one of many examples across the OSCE region. Other alarming cases come from Serbia, where two investigative journalists from the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) had their phones targeted by the NSO Group's Pegasus spyware earlier this year. There are indications of additional surveillance cases across the OSCE region. These cases, as many

others, show that advanced spyware is being used in ways that undermine press freedom without effective safeguards.

Foreign Agent Laws

In recent years, a growing number of OSCE participating States have introduced or proposed legislation targeting so-called “foreign influence” or “foreign agents,” typically focusing on local or international media outlets and civil society organizations receiving support from foreign entities. While authorities often justify such measures on ostensibly legitimate grounds of transparency, national sovereignty, or protection against foreign interference, their scope, language, and implementation are usually problematic from a freedom of expression and media freedom perspective. Under international human rights standards, any such restriction must satisfy the three-part test: it must be clearly prescribed by law, pursue a legitimate aim, and be necessary and proportionate in a democratic society.

Most recently, I have raised my concern with Georgian authorities over their adoption of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, as well as changes to the Grants Law, and their negative impact on independent media. Similar concerns apply in Kyrgyzstan, where foreign agent provisions have been enacted and are actively enforced, requiring registration and reporting obligations for NGOs and media outlets receiving foreign funding. In the Russian Federation, the progressively expanding “foreign agent” framework has been used to label a wide range of media, NGOs, and individuals as agents of external influence, imposing burdensome reporting requirements and enabling severe administrative and criminal sanctions. The Russian authorities also continue to designate some foreign-based media entities and international media freedom organizations as “undesirable”, thus banning them and criminalizing participation in their activities. In Azerbaijan, while there is no foreign agents’ law as such, other legislation, including its Media Law, imposes significant restrictions including requirements for foreign journalists to obtain prior approval from the government to work, strict rules on foreign funding of media outlets, and broad definitions of what is prohibited. This places further strain on an already restrictive media landscape where over 20 journalists have been detained or sent to prison in the last few months. I will continue to engage with authorities on these issues.

While foreign-agent or foreign-influence legislation also exists in other participating States, such as the United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and the United Kingdom’s Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), these frameworks should be continuously assessed against the three-part test to ensure they are not applied in a manner that undermines the commitments set out in the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE documents.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I welcomed that the authorities of Republika Srpska complied with the Constitutional Court's decision to repeal the 'foreign agent' statute in the entity. In Hungary, the proposed "Transparency in Public Life" draft law was postponed and is currently not on the agenda. This is an issue I discussed with the Hungarian authorities and welcome continued engagement.

In general, such laws are problematic in not conforming with OSCE commitments on media freedom, and are frequently vague and overbroad, lacking clear definitions of key concepts such as "political activity" or "foreign influence," creating significant legal uncertainty. This ambiguity facilitates abuse, politically motivated targeting, and discriminatory application. Enforcement is often opaque, with little apparent judicial oversight, and sanctions can be disproportionately severe, including criminal or administrative penalties, sometimes leading to the suspension or banning of media outlets. Many laws also fail to guarantee effective legal remedies, leaving affected organizations without meaningful avenues for redress.

The cumulative effect is a chilling environment for independent journalism and democratic discourse. The "foreign agent" label stigmatizes, and in some cases even criminalises, legitimate journalistic work, particularly when exposing corruption, human rights abuses, or merely criticizes government policies. These trends risk fragmenting transnational media collaborations and pushing outlets into legal grey zones or exile. Small or local media that rely on foreign support due to fragile and captured domestic markets are particularly vulnerable.

Against this backdrop, my Office, together with external experts, is working on a set of recommendations for OSCE participating States in order to pursue their legitimate interests without silencing independent and critical media. For this purpose, we recently convened a structured dialogue to critically assess the implications of foreign agent legislation on freedom of the media across the OSCE region. Our expert discussions confirmed that these laws, their scope, language, and implementation mechanisms have a chilling effect on independent journalism and democratic discourse.

These concerns also relate directly to OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018, which underscores the responsibility of participating States to ensure that journalists can carry out their work safely and without undue legal or administrative constraints.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Office addresses the most pressing challenges to the safety of journalists across the OSCE region, recognizing that threats, harassment, and violence against media professionals not only endanger individuals but also undermine the free flow of information essential to democratic governance, as clearly stated in the Helsinki Final Act

and numerous successive declarations on which participating States have reached consensus and committed to implement, most significantly MC Decision 3/2018 on Safety of Journalists. In line with these commitments and my Mandate, my Office works actively to support participating States in implementing practical measures to prevent attacks against journalists, ensure accountability for violations, and create safer environments for independent reporting. However, despite the clear guidance offered by policy recommendations developed by my Office, implementation of core commitments related to safety of journalists and media freedom remains inconsistent, and much more systematic action is needed by States to meet their commitments.

Through advocacy, capacity-building, legal reviews of draft legislation, and direct engagement with authorities, media organizations, and civil society, my Office works to support the implementation of OSCE commitments on media freedom. Activities carried out during the reporting period directly support these goals and demonstrate concrete steps toward operationalizing Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018.

These initiatives include efforts to further cooperation among OSCE National Focal Points (NFPs) on Safety of Journalists to enhance their ability to monitor and guide the implementation of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 at the national level. An in-person meeting held in Thessaloniki in March 2025 allowed NFPs to share national best practices and identify gaps in the implementation of the Decision. This exchange highlighted the need for systematic, coordinated action by participating States, including the development of preventive mechanisms and measures to address the root causes of violence against journalists and impunity for perpetrators. So far 38 participating States have nominated National Focal Points for Safety of Journalists. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage those who yet have not done so, to communicate the name of their National Focal Point to my Office.

Together with the Austrian Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defence, my Office delivered the first Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) for journalists in May 2025, held at a military base near Vienna. Eighteen journalists from South East Europe, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus participated in a week-long training designed to minimize risk, recognize danger, and develop strategies to remain safe while reporting. This initiative reflects Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018's emphasis on preventive measures. Further HEAT trainings are being planned for 2026.

Furthermore, with the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre, my Office co-organized this year's OSCE-DCAF Summer School on "Improving the Governance and Inclusivity of the Security Sector for Stability and Peace" in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, in June 2025. Participants included twenty-five alumni from the OSCE Academy and five journalists from Central Asia, Mongolia, and Afghanistan. Several sessions focused on protecting journalists and linking media freedom to broader security concerns, reflecting the commitment under

Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 to strengthen cooperation and dialogue among relevant actors to ensure journalist safety.

Finally, my Office published a series of seven podcasts¹¹ featuring expert recommendations on critical areas such as digital safety, legal harassment, and the fight against impunity. By raising awareness and deepening understanding of the diverse challenges to journalists' safety, this initiative contributes to the implementation of preventive measures consistent with Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018's call to protect journalists from violence, threats, and harassment, including those perpetrated online. We shall continue podcasting in 2026.

Environmental Journalism

My Office has also addressed the specific challenges that journalists who cover climate and environmental topics face. We were glad to address this issue at events organised by the Second Dimension Committee, and to ensure that the expertise of colleagues from the Second Dimension is included in our work on this topic. The upcoming "Practical Manual for Journalists on Reporting the Environment", that I will publish in the coming weeks in cooperation with UNESCO, is the first of two handbooks that aim at addressing the safety, legal and other professional challenges that journalists face in covering environmental topics. Environmental journalists play a crucial role in informing the public about climate change, pollution, natural resource management, biodiversity, and other pressing environmental challenges. Yet, in many contexts, they face growing threats often because their reporting challenges powerful economic or political interests. Supporting these journalists is necessary not only to safeguard their personal safety and professional integrity but also to ensure that citizens have access to accurate, independent, and timely information on environmental issues that affect public health, security, and sustainable development.

Journalism in Exile

In some participating States, particularly in the Russian Federation and Belarus, independent journalists can no longer operate safely and have been forced into exile. Exiled journalists play a uniquely important role in providing independent reporting to audiences at home, typically in highly restrictive environments where the availability of independent news and pluralistic opinions is scarce. In doing so, exiled journalists contribute to information of public interest, countering disinformation, and supporting accountability. Their protection, professional sustainability, and ability to work safely are also consistent with the principles of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018. To this end, my Office launched the report "Enhancing Protection of Journalists under Severe Political

¹¹ See: [OSCE Safety of Journalists Series](#)

Pressure”, which focuses on journalists in exile and aims to raise awareness among participating States by offering a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by affected journalists and proposing actionable recommendations for their protection and support.

My Office remains committed to supporting practical measures to enhance the protection, professional sustainability, and safety of journalists across the OSCE region, ensuring that they can continue their essential work and uphold the free flow of information fundamental to democratic societies.

Safety of Female Journalists Online

Building on the broader concerns around the safety of journalists, it is crucial to recognize the specific risks faced by women journalists, who increasingly encounter both online harassment and offline violence. I take this opportunity to remind of the Joint Statement on the Safety of Women Journalists¹² issued by 45 participating States during the Skopje Ministerial Council in 2023. While not a consensual document, it does re-iterate the calls for action consensually agreed in 2018. Among other points, the Joint Statement underscores the causal relationship between online threats and offline violence targeting women journalists. My Office has been systematically documenting such cases, underscoring the urgent need for gender-responsive and targeted protective measures. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of my Office’s flagship project on the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) – a pioneering project launched to address the gender specific threats faced by women in media, particularly in digital spaces. This anniversary was marked as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. An anniversary event titled “SOFJO Testimonials and Film Screening,” took place on Wednesday, 26 November, at Vienna’s Stadtkino im Künstlerhaus. Over the past ten years, SOFJO has united journalists, policymakers, technology experts, civil society, and international partners in raising awareness, strengthening protections, and promoting concrete measures to ensure that female media professionals can carry out their work safely, both online and offline. The event celebrated ten years of impact while also looking at the challenges ahead and featured testimonials from journalists who have been targeted with online violence as well as other experts on the topic. I was encouraged to see many participating States join this commemoration as a visible demonstration of their continued commitment to protecting women journalists and upholding their right to work safely and free from violence and intimidation.

¹² See: [MC.DEL/51/23](#)

Ukraine

The lives of journalists working in Ukraine are under relentless threat. Ukraine now faces the highest number of journalist deaths in Europe since the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Time and again, I have raised alarm – at a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, at a side event by the Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU), and the Vienna conference on journalist safety, to name a few – yet with each passing moment, the number of casualties continues to climb. Over the reporting period, we have observed what appears to be the increasing targeting of journalists and media infrastructure in Ukraine.

The deliberate use of FPV drones¹³ to target and kill media workers in conflict zones is a deeply disturbing new dimension of violence against journalists. Drone technology is being weaponized to silence those who bear witness. Journalists are no longer just caught in the crossfire; they are being hunted with precision from the sky.

I have publicly raised concern about this escalating pattern: on 4 October, I condemned the drone killing of French photojournalist Antoni Lallican and the injuring of Ukrainian photojournalist Heorhiy Ivanchenko; on 17 October, I raised concern over the killing of RIA Novosti correspondent Ivan Zuev and the injuries sustained by his colleague Yuri Voytkovich; on 23 October, I spoke out following the killing of FREEDOM journalists Olena Hramova and Yevhen Karmazin and the injuries sustained by their colleague Oleksandr Kolychiv; on 9 November, I raised alarm after an FPV-drone attack on a vehicle of an aid organization in Donetsk oblast carrying Austrian and Spanish journalists. And on 18 November, I condemned the targeting of Ukraine Public Service broadcasting building and TV tower, including the regional hub of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), in Dnipro.

Each drone strike that falls on a newsroom or a field reporter is not only an assault on an individual life but also an attack on the public's right to know, and the foundations of accountability in war. Such attacks violate International Humanitarian Law, which explicitly protects civilians and journalists in conflict zones, and may trigger legal responsibility for war crimes.

I urge all participating States to uphold their obligations under international law, investigate breaches, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and reaffirm that the protection of journalists – even, and especially, in times of conflict – is indisputable.

I take this opportunity to remind of the 26 Ukrainian journalists arbitrarily detained by the Russian Federation and to call for their release.

¹³ First Person View Drones / Operator Directed Drones

The first SPU media project has already contributed to strengthening ethics, media literacy, and self-regulation. The new phase will have a dedicated focus on safety of journalists.

My Office has stepped up its engagement not only towards greater safety of journalists but also on efforts to promote a strong public interest media in the context of Ukraine's reconstruction.

ONLINE CHALLENGES

Media and Big Tech

The rapid digital transformation of the information environment has fundamentally reshaped how people access, share, and engage with news. While technology has opened new opportunities for participation, it has also concentrated unprecedented power in a few major online platforms and AI companies, who now shape what information is visible, amplified, or suppressed. This concentration constrains access to public interest information and opinion, challenges journalistic independence while creating economic vulnerabilities for media outlets. This digital reality raises profound questions about transparency, accountability, and public oversight.

Last month, I launched our Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI, a major undertaking developed with the expertise and guidance of over 150 practitioners, scholars, and stakeholders from across the OSCE region and beyond. The Manual provides detailed policy recommendations for promoting media viability, visibility, and vigilance, offering both immediate interventions and longer-term structural guidance grounded in international human rights standards and OSCE commitments.

The European Union's digital rulebook, including the Digital Services Act and the AI Act, are also indications of the growing concern about the impact of online platforms and AI, and their full implementation across EU Member States is critical. In a similar vein, the UK Online Safety Act seeks to regulate platforms so as to create a safer digital environment by imposing a legal duty on social media companies to protect users from illegal content, hate speech and misinformation. I note that the scope of this legislation continues to be debated.

I take this opportunity to mention that the Government of Kazakhstan, on 17 November, amended several laws concerning artificial intelligence and digitalisation. The laws establish principles of legality, prioritising human well-being, protection of personal data,

transparency and require that consumers must be informed if a product, work or service has been created or performed using AI.

While the launch of the Policy Manual represents a significant milestone, it is only a starting point. The real challenge now is to bring these principles out of the Hofburg and to line ministries in capitals and practical policymaking processes. Participating States are encouraged to actively engage with the Manual, implement its guidance in national contexts, and translate recommendations into actionable measures that ensure pluralism, independence, and the resilience of public-interest journalism in an era of concentrated digital power and AI-driven information flows. I hope the Policy Manual will assist all of you to take advantage of this AI momentum to centre regulation on human rights due diligence, transparency, accountability, and public oversight. My Office and I stand ready to engage with all of you, and with the OSCE executive structures in doing so.

Joint Declaration 2025

For more than 20 years, the freedom of expression mandate holders¹⁴ come together every year to issue a Joint Declaration – with standard-setting recommendations – on a specific issue we see as fundamental for freedom of expression. This year, we launched a Joint Declaration on AI, Freedom of Expression, and Media Freedom¹⁵.

The Declaration complements the Policy Manual by setting out principles to safeguard freedom of expression, promote a pluralistic and diverse information environment, ensure transparency and accountability, and foster multi-stakeholder cooperation. It provides guidance for States and other actors on responsibly approaching AI technologies while acknowledging the constantly evolving nature of these tools, which requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation.

In essence, the Declaration translates our core human rights principles into the AI context: protecting pluralism, independent journalism, and democratic values in the digital age. Implementing these principles will require policy innovation and practical adaptation, but the underlying rights remain enduring and universal.

Disinformation and Media Literacy

Addressing disinformation requires a comprehensive and principled approach – one that strengthens, rather than constrains, the free flow of information. This includes promoting independent and sustainable public service media, investing in ethical, high-quality

¹⁴ United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

¹⁵ See: [Joint Declaration on AI, Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom | OSCE](#)

journalism, and integrating media literacy into education systems to build long-term societal resilience. My Office continues to actively advance these goals, working with participating States and partners to reinforce the integrity of the information space.

Throughout the reporting period, I have consistently underscored that the manipulation of information threatens not only media freedom, but also democracy and security. In my interventions before the OSCE Security Committee, Human Dimension Committee, as well as at a Council of Europe conference in Malta and the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, I have warned that the deliberate distortion of facts by both state and non-state actors erodes public trust, polarises societies, and weakens democratic institutions. I am increasingly concerned that societies are losing consensus on the core principles of our democratic systems, and that citizens no longer agree on shared facts – a dangerous shift that undermines informed public discourse and, ultimately, societal cohesion. Countering disinformation must therefore be rooted in human rights, media freedom, pluralism, and open debate, not in restriction, censorship, or control. In this effort, I build on the principled positions of my predecessors. My esteemed predecessor, Dunja Mijatović said in 2014, “History has taught us more than once that limits on media freedom for the sake of political expediency leads to censorship and, when begun, censorship never stops.”

In an effort to develop strategies to counter disinformation, my Office has taken a leading role in fostering structured dialogues on the nexus between media freedom and security, breaking the discussion into key thematic areas such as security sector governance and reform, and violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT). These exchanges have brought together representatives of governments, civil society, academia, and the media to identify practical ways to enhance resilience while safeguarding fundamental freedoms, and have depended on the close collaboration between my Office and respective departments within the OSCE Secretariat such as the Conflict Prevention Centre and the Transnational Threats Department’s Action Against Terrorism Unit. The outcomes of these meetings, including a set of actionable recommendations, will be published within the framework of my Office’s project on Media Freedom and Security.

The dialogues have shown that credible responses to disinformation must reinforce, not restrict, public interest media in the information ecosystem. Legal or policy measures that constrain independent journalism tend to weaken societal cohesion and thus resilience. Real strength lies in vibrant, independent media, transparent public communication, and citizens who can critically assess the information they consume.

I welcome the emergence of principles-based, rights-respecting national counter-disinformation strategies in several participating States, including Ireland and Norway. These initiatives focus on empowerment rather than control, combining education,

accountability, and targeted support for independent media. Independent experts contributing to our discussions have repeatedly affirmed that information integrity and media freedom are mutually reinforcing — and that societies are most resilient when journalists can work without fear, citizens are well-informed, and governments are open and trustworthy.

Promoting media literacy is an element of a more complex multifaceted and multistakeholder strategy to counter disinformation. In this context, I recall my Office's "Report on Fostering Media Freedom Literacy across the OSCE region" which provides a framework for strengthening citizens' capacities to engage with information critically with a media freedom-based approach.

Experience from countries such as Finland and France underscore the importance of integrating media literacy into the education system curricula, the earlier the better. We have just started an initiative to collect media literacy curricula from participating states in order to collate them in a compendium that could inspire and encourage a collective media literacy initiative across the OSCE region. Much interesting work is ongoing and I believe we can benefit from an overview of current practices and experiences.

Strengthening media literacy with a freedom of expression and media freedom perspective is essential for democratic resilience, enabling citizens to engage meaningfully and resist manipulation.

Role of Public Service Media and Regulators

Independent and adequately funded public service media, supported by strong and independent regulatory bodies, are indispensable to democratic resilience and trust in information.

In this context, it is essential to underline the importance of independent media regulators, including the value of my Office's observer status at the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA), a key network of media regulators that spans a large part of the OSCE region and supports high regulatory standards.

In this environment, the editorial standards, professional ethics, accountability, and regulatory oversight of public service media are crucial, they ensure citizens have access to verified, contextualised, and pluralistic information. Survey data¹⁶ from the EBU show that radio and television remain the most trusted media across Europe, with radio topping the list in about two-thirds of countries surveyed and television in a third, while social networks are the least trusted, yet most used, in more than three-quarters of

¹⁶ See: [Trust in Media | EBU](#)

countries. Public service broadcasters continue to be the most trusted in their categories (television, radio, and online media), although trust is declining also for them. This underscores the important role of public service and edited media in maintaining public trust in information.

The Public Service Broadcaster Suspilne in Ukraine is a prime example. Amid Russia's war against Ukraine and restrictions under martial law, public trust in Suspilne's news exceeds 80 percent¹⁷. Its transformation from a state to a public service broadcaster demonstrates that independence in editorial matters, supported by an impartial regulator, is both achievable and essential.

I continue to encourage participating States to strengthen the independence and sustainability of public service media and their regulatory frameworks. In line with the Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy of 2023¹⁸, I reiterate that well-resourced, politically independent public service media, together with robust independent regulators, are vital democratic assets for countering disinformation, maintaining public trust, and ensuring freedom of expression remains a reality in the digital age.

I also invite participating States to engage with my Office to implement their OSCE commitments in this area. For example, since June, I have been actively involved in supporting the selection process for the new nine-member Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) in Serbia, following an official invitation from the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić. Working closely with the OSCE Mission in Serbia and the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, my involvement has focused on supporting efforts to facilitate a constructive and collaborative approach between Serbian authorities and media stakeholders, with the objective of safeguarding the integrity, credibility, and legality of the selection process in accordance with the Law on Electronic Media. This engagement is essential to enabling a new REM Council to fulfil its important mandate in society in an impartial, independent, and accountable manner.

In this spirit, I facilitated meetings between Serbian authorities and media stakeholders, fostering open dialogue, inclusion, and encouraging the renewed participation of those who had previously withdrawn from an earlier round of the selection process, in addition to holding numerous conversations and briefings with stakeholders.

To further support the process, my Office prepared an independent legal Memorandum addressing the eligibility of two contested nominator categories: (i) associations of film, stage, and dramatic artists and associations of composers; and (ii) associations aimed at the protection of children. While the Memorandum did not constitute a full legal

¹⁷ See: https://corp.suspilne.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/web-08-12-zvit2024_suspilne_180x255_eng.pdf

¹⁸ See: [542676.pdf](#)

screening of all potential nominators and candidates in these two categories, it clarified key eligibility questions raised by civil society and the corresponding responses of the Serbian Parliamentary Committee for Culture and Information (hereafter: Parliamentary Committee). The analysis was grounded in Serbia's Law on Electronic Media and aligned with international standards and best practices for the composition of an audiovisual media regulatory body.

Following a consultation with the Parliamentary Committee, as well as media and civil society stakeholders on 7 October, my Office provided additional legal clarifications that enabled the Parliamentary Committee to finalize the list of authorized nominators and eligible candidates. Subsequently, on 20–21 October, my Office – together with the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia – observed the final nomination phase in Parliament. During this stage, authorized nominators from nine categories each agreed on a shortlist of two candidates, in an open and constructive manner.

In accordance with the rules of procedure, the Parliamentary Committee held a public hearing on 4 November, where all 18 shortlisted candidates from 9 categories presented themselves. Following the hearing, on 12 November Parliament voted on the candidates for 8 categories, while there was no majority for the candidates proposed in the 9th category. At this moment the process continues and I am hopeful that a legally consistent result will ensue.

Regional Conferences

I was pleased to host two regional media conferences this year under the overall theme “Actioning Media Viability for Informed and Resilient Societies”: the 25th Central Asia Media Conference (13–14 November, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) and the 10th South-East Europe Media Conference (29–30 May 2025, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). I am grateful for the constructive engagement and support provided by the authorities of the conference host countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Uzbekistan. Both events provided valuable platforms for regional and multi-stakeholder networking, grounded in a shared commitment to advancing media freedom and viability – where free, safe, and independent journalism can thrive in today's complex information landscape. Each conference brought together more than 130 participants – including journalists, media experts, civil society representatives, academics, and government officials – to exchange experiences, innovative strategies, and practical approaches. These conferences help inform my Office of the needs and opportunities for engagement in support of OSCE commitments. They also lay the foundation for sustained regional co-operation, enabling participants to strengthen professional networks, build solidarity within the media sector, and launch collaborative initiatives and reforms that promote free, independent, and economically sustainable media – key pillars of informed and resilient societies.

Through these regional platforms, my Office fosters cross-border dialogue with the aim of ensuring that OSCE commitments on media freedom are translated into practical strategies for resilient, independent and pluralistic media systems.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I wish to reaffirm the utmost importance I place on the Mandate entrusted to me. At its core, this Mandate requires engaging constructively with authorities, ascertaining the facts surrounding developments affecting media freedom, and supporting tangible progress in the implementation of our shared OSCE commitments. Through continuous dialogue, monitoring, and targeted assistance, my Office strives to strengthen the conditions for independent, pluralistic, and professional media across our participating States. The “early warning” function of my Mandate instructs me to monitor developments in all 57 participating States and to advocate and promote full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media. The extent of my public and diplomatic engagements in this regard is reflected in the annex to this report.

We are working to develop a more systematic approach to implement and measure progress on Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018, while continuing our strong collaboration with civil society, journalists’ associations, and media freedom organizations. Listening closely to those on the frontlines – journalists and media professionals – we aim to transform commitments into practical protection and support mechanisms.

In this regard, individual RFoM reports on media freedom issues in a number of participating States are under preparation. These reports will list media developments observed since January until November and will also consist of an analytical section with references to OSCE media freedom commitments and requests for clarifications and suggestions for improvements in the participating State concerned. I had hoped to have several reports completed in time for this report to the Permanent Council, however capacity limitations and a heavy workload on other matters has led to a delay. We shall continue with this systematic approach for media freedom developments also for additional participating States in 2026. The reports will provide an overview of media freedom shortcomings and are initially intended to serve as a basis for engagement and dialogue with the participating States concerned.

I wish to thank the Finnish Chairpersonship for placing media freedom high on their agenda, and I welcome that the incoming Swiss Chairpersonship will continue to prioritize

this essential issue. I also wish to thank the Human Dimension Committee and the Security Committee for bringing media freedom into their discussions, highlighting its direct link to security and stability. At this point, it is truly a topic for all three committees, requiring sustained attention and coordinated action in light of fostering comprehensive security.

Engagement by the participating States with my Office has been encouraging, yet the full promise of these commitments can only be realized through sustained action. Implementation of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 remains limited. The commitments adopted by consensus in Milan in 2018 provide a solid framework for protecting journalists, addressing the challenges posed by concentrated digital power, and ensuring a free, safe, enabling media environment.

Let me be clear: Journalism is not a crime, and journalists are not the enemy. Ethical journalism is a public good. What is needed now is not mere reaffirmation, but concrete realization through legislation, enforcement, and steadfast political will.

My Mandate is unique: It represents the only intergovernmental mechanism dedicated to the protection of media freedom. Yet my Office operates on just one percent¹⁹ of the OSCE's Unified Budget, primarily covering the cost of 11 staff, while most operational activities and an additional 13 staff members rely on the generous support of participating States donors – (in alphabetical order) Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America – whose contributions I warmly acknowledge. Despite these constraints, my Office remains committed to acting decisively, leveraging every available resource to advance independent, pluralistic, and ethical media. I urge all participating States to join us in turning commitments into action.

This institution's impact is visible when States engage with our recommendations, adjust legislation, or take action against attacks on the media. Independent evaluations confirm that our interventions make a real difference, while regional conferences and expert consultations foster dialogue, collaboration, and shared solutions. Public statements on urgent threats draw international attention and reinforce accountability, while diplomatic engagements with participating States create opportunities for constructive dialogue, mediation, and practical follow-up, further increasing the reach and effectiveness of our work. In this context, I appreciate the commitments made in my Mandate and in Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/2018 for the full cooperation of participating States in the furtherance of my Mandate.

¹⁹ 1,608,000 Euros

Sustained and predictable funding is essential to maintain this capacity. It allows us to respond rapidly to emerging crises, provide practical guidance, and help participating States to uphold their commitments. Without it, the protection of journalists and the promotion of media freedom across the OSCE region would be significantly weakened. The stakes could not be higher: media freedom is not a luxury, it is a strategic investment in democracy, public trust and, ultimately, in security. Every step we take to protect journalists, safeguard independent media, and foster trustworthy information is a direct investment in accountable governance and the safety of our societies. Let us ensure that these principles are not only upheld in word but realized in action, reinforcing media freedom as a cornerstone of the OSCE's mission and of our shared security.

Annex attached.