Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Regular Report to the Permanent Council
For the period from 24 April 2026 – 30 October 2026

The purpose of this report is to bring the realities observed across the OSCE region into this Council, and to show how my Office has responded. It records serious concerns, but also instances in which participating States have engaged with us, taken steps to address an issue, or opened a path towards reform. Both matter. My mandate is an early warning and response mechanism. Its value lies both in bringing concerns to the attention of participating States, and in sustained engagement with the States concerned to advance practical solutions. My mandate is also a standard setting function and requires me to set benchmarks on emerging media freedom issues, providing policy recommendations to participating States.

During this reporting period, I have continued to engage directly with participating States, journalists, media organisations, and civil society. My Office has intervened on individual cases, reviewed legislative proposals, provided practical guidance, and convened exchanges on challenges that no participating State can address alone. An overview of public and diplomatic engagements, and activities during the reporting period is reflected in the annex to this report.

This report reflects the concerns raised, the responses received, and the follow-up still required. Where there has been progress, it deserves recognition. Where there has been no response, or where a response has not remedied the concern, this too must be clear.

This approach reflects the responsibility entrusted to this mandate nearly thirty years ago: to assist participating States in meeting commitments they themselves have made, and to respond rapidly when the free flow of information and the work of journalists come under threat. The newly updated fifth edition of our compilation of OSCE commitments on freedom of expression, media freedom and the free flow of information serves as a reminder that, even as the information environment changes, the principles participating States have agreed remain relevant; and their observance remains essential.

Freedom of expression is the foundation of media freedom. It protects the right of every person to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas, including views that challenge prevailing opinion, critically question public authorities. Protecting this freedom requires particular vigilance against censorship and efforts to suppress lawful opinion because of its viewpoint. Independent and pluralistic media give practical effect to this right by enabling scrutiny, bringing different perspectives into public debate, and helping people form their own judgements. The same principles must guide our approach regardless of whose views are expressed or whose actions are scrutinised.

These commitments also extend across borders. In the Helsinki Final Act, participating States undertook to “facilitate the freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds” and to improve the conditions under which journalists from one participating State work in another. They also affirmed that journalists should not face expulsion or other penalties for the legitimate pursuit of their profession.

Yet the conditions under which foreign correspondents work have increasingly become a matter of political contention. Visa, accreditation, and residence arrangements become sources of uncertainty or pressure, affecting journalists’ ability to sustain their reporting and audiences’ access to independent accounts of developments abroad. Using such arrangements to penalise critical coverage or make access conditional on favourable reporting runs counter to the commitments undertaken in Helsinki. Facilitating foreign correspondents’

work gives practical expression to the openness and free exchange of information on which those commitments rest.

My mandate remains grounded in those commitments, and provides the basis for my work. My Office receives information from participating States, journalists, media organisations, civil society, international organisations, and other sources, and actively seeks information through monitoring, country visits, and direct exchanges. We compare and check information against public sources. We consult relevant experts and, as appropriate, seek information and clarification from the authorities concerned.

On that basis, I engage in dialogue with participating States, raise individual cases and emerging patterns, and offer legal and policy expertise. Public and diplomatic interventions draw attention to concerns and clarify the standards and commitments relevant to them. These interventions are complemented by sustained follow-up, assistance, and cooperation. Training and capacity-building are an important part of this work, helping journalists, law enforcement officials, regulators, and other stakeholders translate commitments and recommendations into practice. These activities develop skills, strengthen understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, and support cooperation in addressing media freedom challenges. The purpose is not only to provide early warning, but also to support practical implementation.

Legal reviews are a practical part of this assistance. They give effect to the mandate's objective of strengthening the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments and assisting participating States, in a spirit of cooperation, in furthering free, independent, and pluralistic media. Our legal reviews examine draft and existing legislation against OSCE commitments and international human rights standards, identifies provisions that may affect media freedom, and offers concrete recommendations to address them. Engagement with authorities and relevant experts' forms part of the close cooperation with participating States envisaged in the mandate and its provision to assist them "in a spirit of co-operation". This engagement allows us to clarify concerns, discuss legislative options, and support follow-up as laws are adopted and applied. This work provides an opportunity to address risks early and strengthen legal safeguards for independent journalism.

Changes in the information environment have created new opportunities for people to report, share information, and participate in public debate. They have also changed how journalism is produced, distributed, and encountered.

The task before us is to ensure that this expanding capacity for expression also strengthens our societies' capacity for informed decisions.

This requires public policy that supports independent journalism, institutions that remain open to scrutiny, and technological development that serves the public interest. The commitments underlying this mandate provide a foundation for that work. Their relevance endures because the human rights, and democratic institutions they protect endure, even as the means of meeting them change.

This responsibility is made more urgent by the fact that the business model and technological tools supporting journalism are undergoing profound change while the freedoms and conditions necessary for its public role are themselves under pressure.

Implementing the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists

Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 calls for action on arbitrary detention, attacks, impunity, and unlawful surveillance, alongside the review of laws and practices that interfere with independent journalism. Its implementation requires scrutiny of measures whose cumulative effects silences independent public interest journalism. Designations based on alleged foreign influence, burdensome reporting and labelling requirements, and broadly defined national security offences expose journalists to sanctions, simply as a consequence of their professional activity. They stigmatise reporting, discourage sources and partners, and create uncertainty about which professional activities may attract retribution or punishment. This, in turn, generates self-censorship and the loss of information that are vital to an informed citizenry.

There are legitimate grounds to limit media freedom, but these are narrowly defined by international human rights law, in particular Article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and have been further clarified by international and national courts, as well as the UN Human Rights Committee in General Comment No. 34. Restrictions must be provided by law, pursue one of the legitimate aims specified in Article 19(3), and meet strict tests of necessity and proportionality. These standards also underpin the guidance provided by myself and my predecessors.

The war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine continues to make the protection of journalists a matter of immediate urgency. Journalists in Ukraine face grave risks, while attacks on media infrastructure and the detention of journalists deprive people of information when they need it most. Journalists carrying out their work in areas of armed conflict must be respected and protected under international humanitarian law. My Office will continue to raise individual cases and draw attention to the wider conditions in which journalism must operate. I reiterate my call for the immediate and unconditional release of Ukrainian journalists and other media professionals detained by the Russian Federation.

This advocacy has been complemented by practical assistance for journalists working in armed conflict. In April, we contributed to training in Polyana, Ukraine, on reporting in dangerous environments, emergency evacuation, and digital security, and in the coming weeks, together with the Ukrainian Public Service Media, Suspilne, we are organising another training in Polyana, on supporting the mental health of journalists in Ukraine. Participation in an expert workshop in Geneva also supported exchanges on the protection of journalists in armed conflict and the review of thematic guidelines.

Promoting safety of journalists however requires attention beyond the battlefield. Physical attacks, threats, online harassment, surveillance, and legal pressure often combine to make reporting dangerous or impossible in many participating States, to different degrees. Women journalists are subjected to distinct and sustained forms of abuse. Attacks and harassment may even be coordinated from outside the country where a journalist works. Through Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18, participating States agreed on specific measures to protect journalists and enable them to work independently, and without undue interference. This requires prevention, effective investigation, and accountability, as well as care in the language used by those who hold public office.

Attacks and arrests are happening across the OSCE region. I have intervened in cases of attacks, arrests, and imprisonment in a number of OSCE participating States during the reporting period, including with Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Romania, and Serbia.

In Armenia, I acknowledge that Narek Samsonyan and Vazgen Saghatelyan had already been transferred from detention shortly prior to my previous report to the Permanent Council, and welcome that as of 27 October, the court has lifted their administrative supervision and restrictions on public speech.

I have also continued to raise concerns about impunity for crimes committed against journalists in the OSCE region. Recalling the commitment in Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 to "take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists", this requires prompt, effective, independent, and impartial investigations, and bringing all those responsible to justice, including those who order or orchestrate attacks.

Through statements marking anniversaries of unresolved killings across the OSCE region, I keep these cases on the agenda and reiterate that the passage of time does not diminish the responsibility to establish the truth and ensure accountability. As part of my efforts to encourage the implementation of MC Decision 3/18, this year, ahead of our Central Asia Media Conference and my country visits to Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, my Office translated the MC Decision 3/18 in the languages of the five Central Asian countries and Mongolia. While a translation can be seen as a symbolic act - even more so in times of AI - I hope that this will contribute to strengthening national ownership of the important commitments included in this MC Decision. I reiterate my standing offer of support to any and all of the 57 participating States in promoting its implementation.

Since taking up my mandate as Representative on Freedom of the Media, I have sought to systematise the collection and assessment of information about media freedom violations and other developments affecting independent journalism. Considering individual cases in their wider context assists in the identification of emerging challenges, determine appropriate responses, and support sustained improvements.

The RFoM Network of National Focal Points on Safety of Journalists is an important part of this work. Forty-one participating States have nominated focal points, and I welcome the recent nominations by Germany, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom. We have requested updates from the Focal Points on measures taken to implement Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 and on persisting gaps. In parallel, we seek information on media freedom developments from media freedom organisations, journalists' associations, and other relevant stakeholders. Together, these exchanges support systematic follow-up and a fuller understanding of the conditions in which journalists work across the OSCE region. This cooperation builds on the National Focal Points meeting organised with the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship in Bern, already covered in my previous report.

Emerging Trends

Building on this information, my Office prepares country observation reports where developments warrant a closer examination of their wider legal, institutional, and practical context. While timely engagement on individual cases remains essential, considering

developments together enables a fuller understanding of how different measures and practices interact over time. These reports provide a basis for informed dialogue with the authorities and other stakeholders, and for identifying opportunities for cooperation in support of OSCE commitments. The first such report concerned the Russian Federation. It examined five thematic areas: “foreign agent” designations; “undesirable organisations”; provisions concerning the dissemination of “knowingly false information” about, or “discrediting”, the armed forces; the application of anti-extremism legislation; and restrictions on connection speeds and communication services. The findings point to a systematic pattern of restrictions on independent journalism and dissenting views, which are at odds with OSCE media freedom commitments. We have received a response from the Russian authorities and are examining it in light of these findings and recommendations, as part of our continued engagement. The scope and timing of further reports will be guided by observed developments and the Office’s capacity to undertake the necessary research, consultation, and sustained engagement.

The thematic issues listed below build on this examination of how legal provisions, institutional arrangements, and practices interact to affect media freedom. They also draw on my Office’s wider monitoring to consider how similar pressures arise, in different forms and to varying degrees, elsewhere in the OSCE region.

“Foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations”

Legal and administrative restrictions can accumulate around the work of journalists and independent organisations. Broad criteria for “foreign agent” designations, labelling and reporting obligations, and sanctions for alleged non-compliance may stigmatise journalists and discourage cooperation. Such requirements also impose significant administrative burdens, and in some instances criminal sanctions, on individuals and newsrooms.

The effects extend beyond those directly designated. Sources may become reluctant to speak with journalists, partners may hesitate to cooperate, and audiences may be discouraged from sharing or engaging with their reporting. For smaller outlets, the resources required to comply with complex requirements divert time and funding away from journalism itself.

“Foreign agent”-style laws and related legislative initiatives impacting media freedom exist in a number of participating States including Azerbaijan, , Georgia, , and the Russian Federation, although their scope, legal status, and application differ.

Designating organisations as “undesirable”, banning their work, and penalising participation in their activities, can disrupt professional networks and expose people to legal risk for working with, or sharing material from, those organisations. For journalists who rely on cross-border partnerships, training, or the work of media freedom organisations, these restrictions make ordinary professional cooperation more difficult, if not impossible

Our ***Analysis and Policy Recommendations on Foreign Agent Laws***, is being finalised, examining the implications of such laws for freedom of expression and media freedom. The publication will offer guidance to participating States on addressing the concerns raised by these measures, including their impact on independent journalism and cooperation across borders.

Dissemination of “knowingly false information”

Laws criminalizing the “dissemination of knowingly false information” profoundly impacts media freedom, leading to the criminalization of legitimate journalistic work and promoting self-censorship. Vague and overly broad legal definitions of "false information" allow governments and State institutions to selectively enforce these laws. They are frequently used as tools to silence political opposition, critics, and independent voices, under the guise of protecting public order.

Prosecutions of journalists in a number of OSCE participating States, under provisions concerning allegedly false information, including about the armed forces, leading to proceedings also in absentia, illustrate the use of criminal law to suppress reporting that departs from official narratives.

Laws criminalizing the “dissemination of knowingly false information” are used in several OSCE participating States, and my Office is currently conducting an analysis of cases involving journalists charged under such laws.

Anti-extremism legislation and journalism

Legislation criminalizing alleged extremism activities can be misused beyond its legitimate scope to silence dissenting voices and restrict independent journalism. Broad or vague provisions may be applied to journalists who investigate or report on individuals and organisations designated as extremist, or who has alleged affiliation with such organizations, treating their professional activities as evidence of participation in unlawful conduct.

My Office has monitored the application of anti-extremism legislation to journalists and media organizations in Belarus and the Russian Federation, including convictions arising from activities described as gathering material and preparing videos.

Our monitoring has identified cases in which journalists were accused of participating in the activities of a banned organisation, due to their journalistic activities. In some cases, proceedings were held behind closed doors and resulted in lengthy prison sentences. Such cases raise serious concerns about the ability of journalists to investigate and report on matters of public interest, as well as the transparency and scrutiny of proceedings against them. Broad definitions and overlapping sanctions create uncertainty about which professional activities may attract punishment, making independent scrutiny of prosecutions especially important. The effects can extend beyond prosecution. Designation as a person involved in extremist activity may bring additional consequences, including restrictions on access to financial services. I call for the review of laws and cases that penalise legitimate journalistic work and for the release of those detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

I continue to call on participating States to ensure such laws do not interfere with journalism. I welcome the release of journalists and media managers in Belarus during this reporting period, as well as the release of two journalists and reductions in the sentences of others in Tajikistan under the presidential amnesty. I reiterate my call across the OSCE region, to release those who remain detained and address restrictions on independent journalism.

I have previously raised concerns about the impact of laws countering extremism on freedom of expression and media freedom. An updated ***Communique on the impact of laws countering extremism on freedom of expression and freedom of the media*** will be presented in the coming months. It will provide guidance on distinguishing legitimate journalistic activity from participation in unlawful conduct, and on the legal safeguards needed to make that distinction effective in practice.

Access to information and restrictions on communication services

Blocking websites, restricting access to social media and messaging services, and slowing internet connections interferes with the work of journalists and limit the public's access to information. Such measures affect the ability of newsrooms to publish and distribute their reporting, communicate with sources, and reach audiences, including across borders.

The effects are not limited to a single outlet or platform. Where journalists and audiences rely on several interconnected services, restrictions disrupt the process through which information is gathered, verified, published, and received. This is particularly significant for journalists working in exile, who may depend on digital channels to maintain contact with sources and audiences in their home countries.

My Office has monitored restrictions on websites, platforms, and communication services in a number of countries, although the reasons and processes differ. The grounds and procedures differ: restrictions may be imposed by government or regulatory authorities, or ordered by courts in specific proceedings, or independently applied by social media platforms under their content moderation rules and policies, including in response to third-party complaints. They also vary in scope, from blocking individual publications or websites to restricting entire platforms or reducing connection speeds. These differences require careful assessment, alongside the effects on journalists' work and the public's access to independent reporting.

Restrictions on access to information must be assessed against Article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as elaborated in the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34. They must be provided by law, pursue one of the legitimate aims specified in Article 19(3), and meet strict tests of necessity and proportionality. Article 20 also requires States to prohibit by law propaganda for war and advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence; measures implementing these prohibitions must likewise comply with Article 19(3). Restrictions must also be subject to independent review. Their impact on journalists and the public's ability to seek and receive information should form part of that assessment.

Journalists in exile

Across the OSCE region, many journalists have been forced to leave their home countries because they can no longer work safely. Despite various hardships, relocation can allow some to continue reporting, but it does not necessarily end the pressures they face. Journalists in exile may have to navigate challenges related to their legal status, safety, including those of transnational nature, funding, access to sources, and ability to reach their audiences.

These journalists continue to provide information to people in their home countries, often under difficult conditions. Supporting their work therefore requires attention both to their immediate

safety and to the longer-term conditions that allow independent journalism to continue across borders.

To support journalists in exile in addressing these challenges, my Office and the Sustainability Foundation organised workshops and individual consultations in Riga in April. These focused on reaching audiences through YouTube and developing sustainable ways to deliver news digitally. In September, this was followed by digital security training, addressing the protection of accounts, devices, communications, and personal information. Together, these activities respond to the need for displaced newsrooms to work safely while maintaining contact with the audiences they serve.

My Office's ***Progress Report on Journalists in Exile*** examines the conditions in which journalists continue their work after leaving their home countries, the challenges they face in sustaining their reporting, and the good practices in supporting their work. While the report highlights many persisting challenges facing journalists in exile and limiting their ability to carry out their profession, it also highlights positive developments related to the recommendations presented by the RFoM in the 2025 Outcome Report on this topic. Specifically, the report points to increased attention to the need to counter transnational repression; the development of clear guidelines for those developing, selling and using commercial cyber intrusion and surveillance tools; measures to limit the ability of governments to exploit international extradition procedures and Interpol notices to persecute journalists in exile; as well as recognizing journalists in exile as a special group of asylum seekers and issuing emergency residency visas for at-risk foreign journalists by some OSCE participating States, among other measures. The Progress Report was recently presented at the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference and will be released in the coming months.

Safety of journalists covering public events

Journalists covering demonstrations and other public events have faced excessive force and obstruction, reportedly including by law enforcement officials, as well as attacks and intimidation by others. Restricted access, interference with equipment, and detention prevents reporting at moments of particular public interest.

The presence of journalists at public events enables people to understand what is happening, including how authorities respond. When journalists are unable to report safely, the consequences extend beyond those directly affected: the public may lose access to independent information about events that have direct bearing on their rights and public life.

Authorities should ensure that journalists can be identified and work safely, including during policing operations. Allegations of excessive force or obstruction require prompt and effective investigation, and accountability where wrongdoing is established. A number of participating States have guidelines and procedures in place, including through the appointments of Police Liaison Officers. I continue to encourage this practice across OSCE participating States. At the same time, it is important that there is better understanding between police and journalists on their distinct roles in the context of public demonstrations. My Office will continue to conduct capacity building on developing police-journalists' relations.

I intervened on attacks, threats, and obstruction of journalists covering public events in Serbia and Albania, where law enforcement officers either carried out, or failed to protect, journalists

from attacks. I called for effective investigations, accountability, and measures to ensure safe and unobstructed reporting. My Office also observed attacks on journalists covering public events in Germany and France, where the perpetrators were protesters or violent individuals.

Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 encourages State bodies and law enforcement agencies to engage in awareness-raising and training activities on journalists' safety, and to promote the involvement of civil society where appropriate. My Office's capacity-building work supports the implementation of this commitment. My Office has supported practical cooperation between journalists and law enforcement to help translate these responsibilities into everyday practice.

In June, training in Veria, Greece, brought together twelve journalists and twelve police officers for field simulations and exchanges on their respective roles and responsibilities during reporting and police operations. My Office also supported the consultation launching Greece's National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, connecting practical training with wider efforts to strengthen national protection arrangements.

I remind that the ***2020 Special Report on Handling of the Media during Public Assemblies*** provides recommendations for authorities, law enforcement agencies, and journalists on facilitating safe reporting during public events. I encourage participating States to make use of this guidance, including in training and dialogue between police and media professionals.

Hostile rhetoric and online harassment

Hostile rhetoric by public officials and political figures deepens an already difficult working environment, particularly when it is followed or amplified by online harassment, threats, or attacks on journalists' families. The words used by those in positions of authority can shape how journalists are perceived and how others respond to their work.

The following are only a few illustrative examples of the much broader pattern of hostile rhetoric and online harassment against journalists and media across the OSCE region during the reporting period. In Albania, Socialist Party MP Ardit Bido targeted BIRN Albania's executive director Kristina Voko through references to her ethnic background and alleged foreign interests, and accused BIRN Albania of producing "fake news". In Bosnia and Herzegovina, SNSD leader Milorad Dodik challenged the legitimacy of BHRT journalist Vladimir Šušak, dismissed the national broadcaster, and ordered that his microphone be removed during a press conference held by the Republika Srpska entity government. In the United States, President Donald Trump targeted New York Times journalist Maggie Haberman in a social media post on Truth Social, calling her "Maggot Hagerman", "an unattractive person both inside and out". In the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš described media outlet Seznam Zprávy as "the biggest pack of lies in the media". In France, Marine Le Pen said that journalists of the media outlet Mediapart should "put on a Kevlar suit", prompting condemnation from media organisations. Also in France, La France insoumise leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon reportedly described journalists as "devious", "slimy", and "liars" during a press conference. These are only a few examples and reflect a growing trend of political leaders disparaging journalists and media.

In ***Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18***, participating States urged political leaders, public officials, and authorities to refrain from intimidating, threatening, or condoning violence against

journalists, and to condemn such violence unequivocally. Despite this commitment, my Office continues to monitor statements by public officials that stigmatise journalists, question their legitimacy, or expose them to hostility for their reporting. Such statements can discourage independent scrutiny and undermine efforts by other State institutions to protect journalists.

Public officials have a responsibility to avoid language that encourages hostility and to affirm the legitimacy of independent scrutiny. Authorities should take threats seriously and ensure that journalists can seek protection and effective remedies. The 2021 Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression reinforces these responsibilities, calling on politicians and public officials to refrain from intentionally making false statements attacking the integrity of journalists and media workers.

Women journalists experience gender-specific abuse, including threats and harassment intended to silence their reporting. Such attacks may be sustained and coordinated, and their effects often extend beyond the online environment. Journalists may withdraw from public discussion, avoid certain topics, or limit their interactions with audiences and sources.

An assessment of ***Achievements and Gaps in Countering Attacks against Women Journalists*** is in the final stages, and will support practical capacity-building. This work will help identify progress made, challenges that persist, and areas where further action is needed to protect women journalists. Furthermore, we are about to launch an ***online training course for state and non-state stakeholders on monitoring online violence against women journalists***.

Consultations with law enforcement and security representatives have informed the development of these learning materials. My Office also provided training on the safety of women journalists in conflict and crisis for military representatives attending an international course in Almaty, Kazakhstan, bringing journalists' protection into discussions of gender and peacekeeping operations.

Legal harassment and SLAPPs

Legal harassment, including strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), imposes financial and psychological pressure on journalists and discourages critical and investigative reporting. The prospect of lengthy proceedings and substantial costs may be particularly difficult for freelance journalists and smaller newsrooms.

The effect of an abusive lawsuit is not necessarily determined by its final outcome. The time and resources needed to respond can divert journalists from their work, while the threat of further proceedings may discourage publication or prompt the removal of reporting on matters of public interest. This affects both the journalist concerned and others considering similar investigations.

Safeguards against abusive proceedings should allow courts to identify and address such cases at an early stage, while preserving access to justice for those with legitimate claims. Journalists and media outlets also need to be able to access those safeguards in practice, including when they have limited resources.

My advocacy for effective anti-SLAPP legislation is ongoing. I continue to raise this issue during my official visits and bilateral meetings, and welcome legislative developments that extend protection to both domestic and cross-border cases. Such progress must be followed by effective implementation, ensuring that these safeguards are available to those who need them.

During my visit to Albania, I welcomed measures strengthening journalists' protection and advocated the full decriminalisation of defamation and stronger safeguards against SLAPPs. Albania developed a draft anti-SLAPP legislative package covering both domestic and cross-border cases, pending formal public consultations that will provide an opportunity to further strengthen the legal clarity and practical effectiveness of the proposed safeguards, alongside progress towards the full decriminalization of defamation, in line with recommendations I discussed with the authorities during my May 2026 visit.

A significant positive trend during this reporting period has been legislative progress on anti-SLAPP safeguards covering domestic proceedings in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and Romania; effective implementation remains essential.

I welcome the Ukrainian authorities' request for my Office's support, in response to which we delivered a legal review of a proposed anti-SLAPP legislation, and look forward to its adoption and effective implementation.

The forthcoming ***Analysis and Policy Recommendations on SLAPPs*** will examine the use of abusive legal proceedings against those contributing to public debate and offer guidance on safeguards to protect journalists and other affected actors. My Office continues to support participating States in developing and implementing such safeguards.

Cyberattacks against journalists and media outlets

Cyberattacks against journalists and media outlets interrupt their reporting, prevent audiences from accessing information, and place additional pressure on already limited newsroom resources. Attacks on websites, accounts, and digital infrastructure may also compromise unpublished material and sensitive information.

For a newsroom, an attack can mean more than a temporary interruption. Journalists may lose access to their accounts or working materials, be forced to divert resources to restoring their services, or face uncertainty about whether their communications and sources remain secure. Where attacks occur repeatedly, they weaken a newsroom's ability to maintain a reliable connection with its audience.

Effective responses require timely investigation, cooperation with those affected, and access to practical digital-security support. Protecting media outlets against such attacks is an important part of creating a safe environment for journalism.

Surveillance and protection of sources

Surveillance poses a serious threat to media freedom across the OSCE region and beyond. When journalists are targeted by surveillance, their ability to communicate securely, protect

confidential sources, and investigate matters of public interest may be compromised. This has a chilling effect on freedom of expression and on the willingness of sources to share information.

The growing sophistication, scale, and reach of digital surveillance technologies amplify these risks, with consequences not only for journalists and media freedom, but also for the public's right to receive information. Over the past year, we have continued to see how surveillance measures, undertaken by State authorities, including across borders, and facilitated by the proliferation of surveillance technology in the private sector, undermines journalists' ability to fulfil their democratic role.

Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 calls on participating States to refrain from unlawful or arbitrary surveillance techniques, as well as arbitrary or unlawful interference with journalists' use of encryption and anonymity technologies. These commitments reflect States' obligations under Article 12 (Right to Privacy) and Article 19 (Right to Freedom of Expression) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as also reaffirmed in the Ministerial Council Decision 3/18. Surveillance must never be used to intimidate journalists, suppress legitimate reporting, or circumvent the protection of confidential sources. As a matter of principle, surveillance measures targeting journalists or their sources should be avoided. Any exceptional interference must meet a particularly high threshold of justification and be accompanied by robust legal and procedural safeguards. It must be prescribed by clear and precise law, pursue a legitimate aim, and satisfy strict requirements of necessity and proportionality, with independent authorisation and oversight and access to effective remedies. Invoking national security or public order does not dispense with these requirements.

The expert workshop on preventing surveillance against journalists, convened by my Office in Vienna, in cooperation with the OSCE Transnational Threats Department and its Strategic Police Matters Unit, and with the participation of civil society representatives, helped inform this work, bringing expert discussion of the risks into the development of practical safeguards for State institutions.

To support participating States in translating these commitments into practice, I am pleased to announce the launch of a ***ten-step action plan for State institutions to prevent undue surveillance of journalists***. The action points, accompanied by a policy brief, will be circulated shortly.

Cumulative effect

All the different forms of pressures listed so far typically do not exist in isolation from each other. In fact, they frequently overlap and reinforce one another. Taken together, these measures expose journalists to multiple sanctions in connection with their work. Their cumulative effect makes it difficult to continue reporting, discourage cooperation with other journalists and organisations, and deter sources from coming forward. They also particularly underline the importance of functioning protection mechanisms for journalists, timely investigations into attacks, independent oversight, and effective remedies. My Office will continue to engage with participating States on practical follow-up to these concerns, and promote positive institutional and judicial responses where they occur.

Media freedom in the evolving information environment

The conditions in which journalism is produced, distributed, and received have been changing dramatically in the past few years. Digital platforms and artificial intelligence create opportunities for journalists to reach audiences, develop new forms of reporting, and work across borders. At the same time, they increasingly shape which information people encounter, how it is presented, and whether independent journalism can reach the public.

These developments have implications for media freedom that extend beyond individual decisions to remove or restrict content. They concern the wider conditions in which journalism operates: access to audiences, the visibility and viability of public interest reporting, the protection of journalists and sources, and the ability of people to navigate an increasingly complex information environment.

Supporting public interest journalism and informed participation

The 1994 Budapest Document recognised independent and pluralistic media as essential to an open society and accountable government. The 1999 Charter for European Security, adopted in Istanbul, committed participating States to ensuring the basic conditions for free and independent media. These commitments require attention to ownership, independent regulation, resources, and professional cooperation, as well as formal protection of the right to publish.

The challenges facing the information environment also require attention to the conditions in which independent journalism is produced, sustained, and reaches the public. Through the ***Public Interest Framework***, my Office is examining how regulation and self-regulation, information infrastructure, and education can support independent and diverse journalism.

Independent Regulation

Regulation is the first pillar of the Public Interest Framework. Independent regulators have a distinct role in upholding media pluralism and applying the rules governing the media sector. Their independence depends not only on their formal powers, but also on transparent appointments, adequate resources, and the ability to carry out their responsibilities without undue interference. As the information landscape has become ever more complex, the role of independent regulators is increasingly important in ensuring access to information that people can trust.

In Serbia, I helped facilitate dialogue on constituting the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, welcoming progress while emphasising the need to complete the process and safeguard its independence from political pressure.

I recognise positive structural developments and reforms to strengthen media freedom in Hungary, and I continue to be in contact with Hungarian authorities on these processes.

Reforms and review processes also provide opportunities to strengthen these institutions. Financing arrangements should provide adequate and predictable resources, while appointment procedures and governance structures should safeguard political, functional, and

financial independence. Such processes benefit from transparent consultation with the institutions concerned, media professionals, and the public.

Consultations with members of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) have examined the future of media regulation in a changing information environment. The discussion examined how regulatory approaches can respond to evolving services and a wider range of actors involved in producing, distributing, and shaping access to information, while safeguarding editorial independence and freedom of expression.

It also considered the role of independent regulation in supporting the conditions for public trust, including transparency, accountability, and access to diverse sources of information. A central question is how regulation can serve the public interest in an information environment shaped by actors with different roles and responsibilities, while protecting open debate and independent journalism.

These exchanges were complemented by contributions by my Office to a public interest and media law workshop in Oxford and to discussions among European regulators in Tirana and Dublin, on the future of media regulation, trust in media, and the protection of children online. They provided opportunities to examine how legal and regulatory approaches can respond to changing public needs while preserving independent journalism.

The Framework also considers the contribution of independent self-regulation. My Office's consultation with the Alliance of Independent Press Councils in Europe (AIPCE) on the future of media self-regulation forms part of this work and is discussed further in the section on ethical journalism below.

A comprehensive report bringing together these discussions and developing policy recommendations under the Public Interest Framework is now being finalised. It will consider the respective roles of regulators, self-regulatory bodies, media organisations, and other actors in supporting a diverse and accessible information environment.

Infrastructure and access to public interest information

Infrastructure is the second pillar of the Public Interest Framework. It examines the systems and services that enable information to be produced, distributed, and accessed, and the extent to which journalists and audiences depend on a limited number of technology companies to use them.

Consultations with journalists and technology alliances supporting journalism are exploring ways to address this dependency. These exchanges have explored how different forms of infrastructure and cooperation can support independent media in maintaining connections with their audiences and distributing public interest information.

This work will continue during the next reporting period, with a view to identifying practical approaches that support a more diverse and resilient information environment while preserving editorial independence.

Independent Public Service Media

Independent public service media are essential infrastructure to ensure a diverse media environment and informed public debate. Their ability to fulfil their responsibilities depends on safeguards that protect them from undue political and commercial influence, as well as resources that allow them to operate effectively.

Across the OSCE region, my Office has observed how uncertainty over funding, changes to governance arrangements, and difficulties in appointing governing bodies affect the independence and functioning of public service media. Where broadcasters face persistent financial pressure, the consequences extend to their ability to maintain services, invest in journalism, and reach the audiences they are mandated to serve.

While trust in media in general is declining across the region, trust in public service media remains generally high. This is important to sustain, especially as public service media contribute as a societal bulwark against disinformation.

I engaged with authorities and other stakeholders in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Czech Republic on the independence, governance, and sustainable financing of public service media.

In the United Kingdom, my Office contributed advice on public service journalism and resilience to disinformation in the context of the BBC Charter review, and stands ready to contribute further expertise.

I have consistently advocated for the editorial independence of public service media in my engagement with participating States, emphasising the need for governance and financing arrangements that enable them to fulfil their responsibilities without undue interference.

Education and informed participation

Education is the third pillar of the Public Interest Framework. It reflects the importance of equipping people to understand how information is produced, distributed, and encountered, and to participate in public debate. This includes understanding the role of independent journalism, the responsibilities of different information actors, and the ways in which digital platforms and AI shape access to information.

The forthcoming ***Media Literacy Compendium***, will bring together examples of media and information literacy curricula from across the OSCE region. By making these approaches accessible in one place, the Compendium will support exchanges among educators, media professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders on how to develop these skills for people of different ages. It will also provide a basis for sharing experience and identifying opportunities for cooperation across the region.

Ethical journalism

Professional ethics and editorial independence are closely connected. Independent journalism needs the freedom to scrutinise those in power, alongside professional practices that enable audiences to understand how information has been gathered, verified, and presented. Accuracy, appropriate context, correction of errors, and care for those affected by reporting help sustain that relationship with the public.

Together with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I raised concerns about professional and ethical standards in public service broadcasting, emphasising the importance of appropriate editorial context and impartial assessment.

Independent self-regulation provides a means of upholding these responsibilities while preserving editorial autonomy. Press councils and other self-regulatory bodies offer channels for complaints, scrutiny, and correction, allowing professional standards to be developed and applied without political direction of coverage.

Exchanges with the Alliance of Independent Press Councils in Europe (AIPCE) have addressed the future of media self-regulation. These discussions have considered how independent press councils and other self-regulatory bodies can uphold professional standards and public accountability as journalism evolves, while preserving editorial autonomy. The consultation took place at AIPCE's recent annual meeting in Oslo.

Practical training complements these exchanges on professional standards. Together with the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, my Office organised a Summer School of Journalism combining professional reporting skills with journalists' safety. In Mongolia, training delivered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and support from the Media Council brought together more than sixty journalists to work on media literacy, verification, editorial independence, ethical standards, and public trust.

This work forms part of the regulation pillar of the Public Interest Framework and will inform the report now being finalised. It examines how self-regulation can respond to changes in journalistic practice and the emergence of new information actors, while maintaining clear distinctions between professional accountability and control over editorial decisions.

Editorial independence in private media

Editorial independence is equally important in privately owned media. Journalists and editors must be able to make professional decisions without undue influence from political or commercial interests, including those of media owners, advertisers, or other powerful actors.

Ownership structures have a direct bearing on the diversity of information available to the public. Transparency must extend beyond the formal ownership of an outlet to make clear who ultimately owns or controls it, and which interests may influence its operation. This enables audiences, journalists, and oversight bodies to identify potential conflicts of interest and assess risks to editorial independence.

Transparency alone, however, does not guarantee pluralism. Safeguards against excessive concentration of ownership and control are also necessary to prevent a small number of

political or commercial actors from exercising disproportionate influence over the information available to the public. A plurality of outlets does not necessarily mean a plurality of independent voices where ownership, financing, or editorial influence is concentrated in the same hands.

These concerns require particular attention where media organisations operate across borders and ownership decisions in one jurisdiction may have consequences in another. Changes in ownership should therefore be assessed for their implications for editorial independence and media pluralism in the markets concerned, with cooperation among relevant independent authorities where appropriate.

I have engaged on a proposed media acquisition affecting media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia; and I have raised concern with authorities in Georgia on regulatory pressure affecting broadcasters, and in Albania on issues of media ownership transparency.

Independent oversight, clear safeguards for editorial decision-making, and professional self-regulation also help protect journalists from interference while supporting accountability to audiences. The objective is an open and diverse information environment in which no single actor can monopolise public debate and audiences can access a range of independent sources and perspectives.

My Office will continue to engage with participating States, independent regulators, media owners, journalists, and professional organisations on measures that support editorial independence and pluralism across the media sector.

Disinformation, FIMI, and informed public debate

Disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) add another dimension. They exploit vulnerabilities in the information environment to influence public debate, undermine confidence in independent and credible sources, and make it more difficult for people to assess information and participate in public life. As public interest journalism remains an important antidote against disinformation, addressing these challenges requires both effective responses to harmful operations and sustained attention to the conditions that enable independent journalism and informed public debate.

Disinformation and FIMI can involve more than the dissemination of false or misleading claims. They may also include coordinated efforts to amplify narratives, obscure the source of influence, discredit or silence independent voices, and create confusion about what can be trusted. Their effects are not limited to whether a particular claim is believed. Repeated manipulation deepens divisions, undermine confidence in institutions and independent reporting, and make it harder for people to assess evidence and make informed decisions. These effects are particularly consequential during elections, crises, and armed conflict, when the public needs timely access to reliable information.

Responses must address both immediate threats and the conditions that make societies vulnerable to them. Detecting and disrupting manipulation is important, but so is the longer-term work of sustaining independent journalism, ensuring access to information, strengthening media literacy, and building institutions that are open to scrutiny. Safeguards for freedom of

expression must guide these efforts, ensuring that measures targeting manipulation do not suppress legitimate debate, critical reporting, or dissenting views.

Independent public service media have a particular contribution to make in this context. Their public remit enables them to provide reporting for diverse audiences, including communities whose information needs may not be adequately served by commercial media. During crises, their capacity to provide verified, timely, and accessible information can help people understand events and assess competing claims. This contribution depends on the editorial independence, adequate and predictable funding, and access to audiences discussed in the preceding section.

The 1991 Moscow Document recognised the media's right to collect, report, and disseminate information and their importance for accountable government. These commitments must guide responses to information manipulation. Reporting that challenges public authorities, including on military affairs, cannot be treated as unlawful solely because it contradicts an official position or damages an institution's reputation. Overbroad and vaguely defined offences concerning "false information" or "discrediting" institutions risk discouraging investigation and legitimate criticism, particularly where their meaning is uncertain and penalties are severe. Independent scrutiny of the necessity and proportionality of restrictions is essential.

The ***Structured Dialogues on Media Freedom and Security***, have brought together journalists, researchers, civil society, public authorities, and security experts to examine how cooperation can address information threats, strengthen societal resilience, and protect independent scrutiny. The dialogues have covered elections, security sector governance and reform, the climate crisis, and counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism. During this reporting period a Structured Dialogue, organised in partnership with ODIHR, focused on safeguarding media freedom and electoral integrity, countering disinformation, and strengthening trust. My Office also brought these issues into ODIHR's training for national human rights institutions in Zagreb, facilitating sessions on disinformation and the impact of AI on the information space.

The forthcoming report ***Strategies against Disinformation: From Response to Resilience*** is the result of a wide-ranging consultation process with experts and practitioners from across the OSCE region, including through these dialogues. Drawing on their research, practical experience, and diverse perspectives, it will offer practical guidance on responding to disinformation and information manipulation while strengthening the conditions for informed public debate.

It considers how relevant actors can detect, assess, attribute, and disrupt harmful operations, while recognising that these actions require different forms of evidence, expertise, and responsibility. It also examines the longer-term capacities that enable societies to withstand manipulation: independent and pluralistic media, access to information, transparent institutions, and an informed public.

A central question is how to assess whether a response has achieved more than addressing an individual incident. This includes whether it strengthened access to reliable information and independent scrutiny, improved cooperation among relevant actors, and reduced vulnerabilities that may be exploited again.

My Office has also been participating in the 1st Plenary Meeting of the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (CAHFIMI) and provided information on the applicable international law provisions and relevant OSCE commitments.

Big Tech and artificial intelligence

Digital platforms have become central to the distribution of journalism. Across the OSCE region, over half of the news audiences access journalistic content through social media platforms, according to data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Platform's systems for ranking, recommending, and moderating content can determine whether reporting reaches an audience. Restrictions on accounts or content can have immediate consequences for the free flow of information, while the design of recommendation systems can influence which sources are visible and which are overlooked.

In this regard, I sought clarification from YouTube concerning the blocking of Belarusian state-media channels, emphasising the importance of transparent procedures and meaningful review of decisions.

Artificial intelligence adds further questions. Newsrooms can use AI tools to support research, production, and accessibility. Yet the increasing use of automated systems to find, summarise, and present information also raises questions about how sources are selected, how journalistic work is used, and whether audiences can identify and access the original reporting on which they depend.

The ***Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI***, published last year, provides guidance on these challenges. Its publication was a starting point: the task now is to translate its recommendations into practical measures that respond to the circumstances of participating States and the needs of journalists and audiences. During this reporting period, my Office has engaged with authorities, regulators, media organisations, and other stakeholders on the application of the Manual. These exchanges have addressed the transparency and accountability of technology companies, the visibility and remuneration of journalism, and the need for infrastructure that enables independent media to operate and reach the public. We are also collecting examples of good practices and initiatives that can inform further implementation.

I also invite participating States to engage with us on the application of the Policy Manual on media freedom in the age of Big Tech and AI, and on the conditions needed for independent, pluralistic, and public interest journalism to reach the public in a changing information environment.

Briefings for authorities in Tajikistan, a workshop with the World Association of News Publishers in Marseille, and participation in UNESCO's regional workshop in Sarajevo helped bring this guidance into discussions of national policy and the future of journalism. A youth workshop within the Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague brought young people's perspectives into discussions of AI governance and other emerging technologies.

Cooperation on technology and human rights

The questions raised by platforms and AI cut across institutional mandates. My Office has therefore worked with the OSCE Chairpersonship, other executive structures, including ODIHR, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to ensure that freedom of expression and media freedom are reflected in wider discussions on technology, human rights, and comprehensive security.

Cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on Artificial Intelligence has helped bring these issues into dialogue with parliamentarians, including on opportunities for implementation activities in Ukraine. My Office has also engaged with UNESCO and other international partners on the conditions for journalism in a digital platform environment, including the question of fair remuneration for journalistic work.

Together with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, I launched the ***Joint Declaration on the Right to Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of Children in the Digital Age***.

The Declaration addresses the challenges children face online while recognising their rights to seek, receive, and impart information. It offers guidance for addressing risks in the digital environment alongside children's ability to express themselves and participate in public life.

Supporting the community of journalists

While the focus of my activities in the reporting period has been on ensuring that the conditions exist for media and journalists to operate freely and safely, my Office has also engaged in activities that have provided direct support to journalists in the form of capacity building. Training for journalists is complemented by work with law enforcement, military representatives, national human rights institutions, regulators, and young people. These activities connect policy recommendations with the responsibilities and situations participants encounter in their work.

Cooperation with educational partners has also brought media freedom into wider discussions of security, technology, and public participation. Contributions to the WIN Academy with the OSCE Gender Issues Programme and Sapienza University, and to the Regional Academy on the United Nations, addressed journalists' working conditions, digital safety, online harassment, SLAPPs, media literacy, disinformation, and trust. The Regional Academy also provided an opportunity to discuss preliminary findings of the assessment of attacks against women journalists. A workshop co-organised with the Austrian Centre for Peace focused on technology and the participation of women and young people at the grassroots level, while a youth event with the Regional Academy considered global transformation and future generations.

Our annual media conferences in South East Europe and Central Asia support participating States in implementing OSCE media freedom commitments. During this reporting period, my Office organised the 11th South East Europe Media Conference in Tirana and the 26th Central

Asia Media Conference in Bishkek. Each brought together more than 140 participants from the respective region and the wider OSCE area, including journalists, media experts, civil society, academics, government officials, and representatives of international organisations.

These conferences provide a setting in which concerns identified through monitoring can be examined alongside national experience and opportunities for practical cooperation. They demonstrate the Office's convening power, offering journalists a safe space to raise concerns and creating opportunities for cooperation both within and between countries. Discussions addressed journalists' safety and mental well-being, accountability for attacks, digital surveillance, media ownership transparency, and the impact of Big Tech and AI. They also examined regulatory frameworks, ethical and investigative journalism, professional standards, journalism education, and media and information literacy curricula.

The conferences are also active tools for promoting implementation of OSCE commitments. In Tirana, a workshop helped shape the South East Europe implementation roadmap for the Policy Manual on Big Tech and AI; in Bishkek, the Central Asian roadmap was presented to guide further engagement. Such follow-up connects regional exchanges with practical assistance tailored to national needs. By bringing these perspectives together, the conferences strengthen professional networks and help identify priorities for further assistance and cooperation. They support our continuing engagement to ensure that independent, pluralistic, and sustainable media can fulfil their democratic role safely and without undue interference.

Environmental journalism is another area in which guidance is being put to practical use. The joint RFoM–UNESCO manual, ***Reporting the Environment: A Practical Manual for Journalists***, was presented at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. The manual has also been used for training by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, and the Mongolia Press Institute.

Alongside the safety, ethics, media literacy, and digital training described above, my Office has supported journalists in Ukraine in dealing with trauma and psychological stress.

The mandate at 30: strengthening implementation

As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of this mandate,

I call on participating States to reaffirm our shared commitments to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and the free flow of information, and to renew their resolve to put these commitments into practice.

Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 recalls that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in accordance with Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It recognises that this right "constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress and development".

The Decision also recalls the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Copenhagen Document, reaffirming that the right to freedom of expression includes "freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and

regardless of frontiers". These commitments must guide our common efforts, particularly when that freedom comes under pressure.

The anniversary provides an opportunity to assess the progress made, identify persistent gaps, and agree on practical priorities for cooperation. I encourage participating States to work with my Office on the implementation of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18, including through national protection arrangements, the review of laws and practices affecting journalists, and the sharing of experience on measures taken.

The value of our commitments is ultimately measured in the daily lives of journalists: in their ability to work safely and independently, and in the ability of people across the OSCE region to seek, receive, and share information. This is the task that continues to guide my mandate, and I look forward to working with all participating States to advance it.