

Berlin, 25 November 2020

Statement by Michael Roth, Minister of State for Europe, on behalf of the Council at the
November II Plenary Session of the European Parliament

President, Honourable Members,

I regret that I cannot be with you in person on the occasion of this plenary session, and I would like to thank President Sassoli for granting me this opportunity to address you in writing again. I will follow this debate attentively from Germany.

Thank you for inviting the Presidency to share its views with you today.

The topic of this debate raises important issues in relation to media pluralism and media freedom, which are key elements of rule of law.

You will understand it is not for the Council to intervene in bilateral matters between Member States or between a Member State and another country, and it has not discussed the specific issue at hand.

However, whilst safeguarding media pluralism is primarily the responsibility of the Member States, the Council considers it to be a vital issue and will approve this coming Friday (27 November) conclusions which underline the utmost importance of a sustainable, pluralistic and trustworthy media system.

Rule of law is a key guarantor that our common values are well protected and complied with - and a basic enabler of our citizens' most fundamental rights.

Rule of law is a priority for the German Presidency. This is why we framed a new approach to the Council's Annual Rule of Law Dialogue, that dovetails with the first annual rule of law report by the Commission. A first horizontal discussion was organised at the General Affairs Council on 13 October. Last week, Ministers for European affairs had a country-specific discussion on five Member States.

This first country-specific discussion was an important opportunity for Member States to exchange best practices and comments, in an open and transparent manner. I was glad to see that we had a high level political dialogue, a constructive, forward looking exercise, which allowed Member States to learn from each other.

The Commission rule of law report is a valuable, high quality document, that ensures that our discussions are based on sound evidence, while respecting the principle of equal treatment of Member States. One of its four pillars is devoted to media pluralism and media freedom. These two elements are key enablers of the rule of law, democratic accountability and the fight against corruption.

To ensure a healthy and plural media environment, political independence is key. Therefore, regulation against direct political interference and a solid, transparent framework for media ownership are essential.

At the same time, the role of journalists is paramount. Protecting them from threats, attacks and smear campaigns is a basic pre condition for free and plural media.

Among the tools we have to uphold the fundamental rights in this field, the most prominent is the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. It enshrines the right to hold opinion, the freedom of expression, the right to education and the respect of media freedom and pluralism.

The Charter is fully part of Union law and the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, oversees its application.

We are also looking forward to the European Democracy Action Plan to be presented by the Commission shortly, which will be an important contribution to strengthening democratic integrity as well as media freedom and media pluralism.

Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a fruitful debate.
