EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC
OF HUNGARY TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

Statement on behalf of the European Union

by

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at the

33rd session of the Committee on Information

New York

27 April 2011

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –

Mr. Chairman,

1. The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* and Montenegro*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. Chairman,

2. Let me at the outset congratulate you and the other members of the bureau on your election and assure you of the EU's commitment to supporting your work and making this 33rd session of the Committee on Information a success. I would also like to commend Under-Secretary-General Akasaka and his staff for all their efforts in delivering the UN message to a worldwide audience.

Mr. Chairman,

3. "It's how we tell the world what is happening" – the words of a group of young Tunisians using their phones to post pictures of their revolution on Facebook. This spring has seen the dawn of a new information order, with ordinary citizens harnessing the power of social media to re-establish a connection with the outside world and with each other. These tools have helped them break through the barriers of censorship and repression. What role social media have played exactly in the Arab Spring will probably remain the subject of debate for a long time to come – the fact itself that they have played a role seems beyond dispute. The fact that social media contributed to social change. Who would have thought five years ago, when the first tweet simply said, and I quote: "inviting co-workers"?

4. Tweets and Facebook messages can complement but not come in the place of good old-fashioned journalism and its editors and fact-checkers. The strength of social media, its spontaneous and unedited nature, is also its weakness. For example, a video on several social media sites of what was claimed to be a recent protest, actually showed a demonstration that occurred back in 2009.

5. Of course, in many countries journalists can't properly do their job of unearthing the truth. Just last week, we were shocked to learn about the killing of photojournalists Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros in an explosion in Misrata, Libya. As the Committee to Protect Journalists reported, in 2010 at least 42 journalists around the world were killed for their work, with Internet-based journalists making up an increased portion. While overall this represents a significant drop from 2009, the levels of violence and impunity remain unacceptably high.

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* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

6. Freedom of expression in general is close to our heart, which why on May 6 the EU will be hosting a conference on it. Press freedom, an important component of freedom of expression, is not just an end in itself, but also an effective instrument to promote peace, spur sustainable development and alleviate poverty. To quote from Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen: "There has never been a famine in any country that has been a democracy with a relatively free press.". Research proves that press freedom makes for a more responsive and responsible government. The press can, for example, give the people a voice and shine a light on growth-retarding corruption. Of course, social media can be of tremendous help here as an additional source of information for journalists, with surveys showing that most of them are well aware of both the advantages and the pitfalls.

7. With "we the peoples", ever more connected through social networks, the UN cannot stay behind. Fortunately, as we can read in the reports before us, this is not the case. What is more, the use of social media by the UN will expand. We encourage the UN to at the same time take up the challenge of expanding the reach of social media tools in as many languages as possible.

8. Multilingualism in general is a mainstay of DPI's mandate. Every language equals a separate communication channel and DPI must work through all the necessary channels to get the message out. The message of a UN coming up with global solutions to global problems. Multilingual considerations need to be front and center in the development of the UN webcast and other multimedia tools. Partnerships with academic institutions have proven an efficient way to increase the number of web-pages available in all six official UN languages and that is why we would like to see more of them.

9. The website, which continues to improve through better organization, cohesion and user-friendliness, remains an asset to the organization, delivering messages about the UN's work straight to people's homes and offices – in 2010 the site was visited no less than 28 million times.

10. The reports before us, which thankfully provide more quantitative information than ever, serve as a guide to DPI's communication activities in all the three main pillars of the UN's work, namely peace and security, development and human rights. On peace and security, DPI for example provided communications support to the peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire UNOCI, which itself became a target of direct attacks and a hostile media campaign. On development, it is gratifying to see that the term "Millennium Development Goals" has now become a household name in the global media, despite past scepticism that this brand was too complex to be a useful communications tool. On human rights, the EU we would like to see more information in next year's reports about what the Department does to promote human rights and the UN's results in this area, commensurate with its status as one of the three pillars of UN activity. We commend the Department's network of information centres for their many events marking Human Rights Day.

11. More in general, these regional and local centres are an invaluable link to the public. They say "all politics is local" and to a certain extent the same holds

true for communications. We look forward to the establishment of the UN Information Centre in Luanda to, as one of the reports puts it, "strengthen the ability of the UN to engage Portuguese-speaking audiences throughout Africa."

12. Such new activities take place in an overall climate of austerity that we are all confronted with. Fortunately, the reports before us show that DPI is aware of this and is cutting corners to save money, for example by having information centres share premises with other members of the UN country team. The EU encourages such efficiency measures that enable the Department to do more with less, including through a pragmatic and cost-effective mandate implementation.

13. What we mandate the Department to do is each year outlined in the resolution on "Questions relating to information". Our objective is a focused resolution that allows DPI to effectively support the UN's core business of promoting peace and security, development and human rights. The EU wants to thank the G77 and in particular its Chair Argentina for engaging in a technical effort to streamline this text ahead of the session. We fully understand that the resolution cannot but exceed the 140 character Tweet limit of Twitter – however, we do believe that much scope remains to do away with overlaps and redundancies and look forward to continuing this streamlining practice next year. A clear, concise and concrete resolution is a common interest. If anything, a Committee on Information can be expected to communicate clearly.

Thank you.