

Statement by Mr. Andras Kos, Minister Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations (23 April 2012)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Acceding country Croatia, the candidate countries — the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland and Serbia —, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates — Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina —, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the two new members of the Bureau. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you, Mr. Chairman and the other members of the bureau of our commitment to supporting your work and making the 34th session of the Committee on Information a success.

I would also like to thank Mr. Mahar Nasser, the Acting Head of Department of DPI for his statement. We commend the continued efforts of the Department of Public Information in communicating the ideals and work of the United Nations to the world in a fashion that is accessible, acceptable and understandable to the widest possible audience.

Mr. Chairman,

In the spring of last year, we witnessed the dawn of a new information order with ordinary citizens harnessing the power of social media to reestablish connection with the outside world and each other. It helped people in the Middle East to break through the barriers of censorship and repression, call out injustice, demand democratic change, and convey unique news to the outside world. Social media have undoubtedly become important tools for global communication. But it can not completely replace traditional journalism: traditional means of communication are essential to present the overwhelming deluge of data in a meaningful and veracious manner. The UN Department of Public Information (DPI) also needs to strike this balance when disseminating information on the UN work to millions of people around the world.

Looking at DPI's recent activities, let us highlight the efforts to catalyze support for the International Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro next June. DPI's participation in the Secretary General's campaign "UNiTE to end violence against women" is also worth noting, as well as its fruitful collaboration with the Department on Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department on Field Support (DFS). Let me here also refer to the efforts that have been made throughout this year to translate and make available in all UN official languages the new Website of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. These efforts contribute to the overall mission of the Department to reach out to the peoples of the world and must be further expanded.

New information and communication technologies and social media do not only enable the UN to do all these numerous activities in a more cost-effective and environmentally friendly manner, but also allow it to connect with new audiences, such as the youth. In addition, it is paramount that the Department of Public Information makes the most strategic use of the wealth of available resources — including its network of 63 UN Information Centers and all other UN entities at the national and regional levels — to speak with one strong and clear voice. In this respect, we commend the efforts of the Secretary General in rationalizing, in consultation with all concerned Member States, the network of United Nations Information Centres along the lines of the centre in Brussels which now covers most of Western Europe in as many as thirteen different languages.

We welcome the ongoing coordination efforts of the UN Communications Group, especially as regards the campaign on the Millennium Development Goals. In our view, the UN Communications Group is an important tool for coordinating communication strategies implementation throughout the UN system, which needs to be further taken advantage of. In particular, the UN Communications Group may prove a useful platform for sharing best practices about the use of local and UN official languages.

The UN website has improved through better organization, cohesion and user-friendliness. It remains an important asset to the organization, delivering messages in all UN official languages about the UN's work straight to people's homes and offices.

Mr. Chairman,

There can be a debate on means of communication, but there should not be one on principles. In its annual resolution on "Questions relating to Information", the GA reaffirmed its commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media. These principles are key instruments to achieve the objectives we set ourselves in the Charter. Freedom of expression helps promote peace, spur sustainable development and alleviate poverty. Freedom of expression makes governments more responsive. That is why the GA urged all member states to ensure that journalists can perform their tasks freely and effectively.

The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the renowned Yemeni press freedom activist Tawakul Karman, Chairwoman of "Women Journalists Without Chains", along with two other female leaders, recognizing her relentless battle for a free press in Yemen, but also highlighting the free flow of information as vital for peaceful and democratic societies.

Unfortunately, over the past few years, far too many journalists worldwide have been censored, jailed, kidnapped or killed for their work. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a total of 908 journalists have been killed since 1992, and 46 only last year. It was just a couple of weeks ago when an acclaimed international reporter and a photojournalist were killed in their makeshift press center in Homs, Syria, during the shelling of the city by Syrian forces. We strongly condemn these attacks. It is our collective responsibility to put an end to those tragic events and to hold the perpetrators responsible for their crimes.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I close, let me reiterate how important multilingualism is for the European Union. It is a unique feature of the UN and a fundamental feature of multilateralism. It is a matter of accountability, transparency, ownership and, eventually, sustainability of the action carried out by the Organization. Every language equals a separate communication channel and DPI must work through all the necessary channels to get the message out. Multilingual considerations need to be front and center in the development of the UN webcast and other multimedia tools. Enhanced cooperation with the regional and local levels and partnerships with academic institutions have proven an efficient way to increase the number of web-pages available in all six official UN languages: that is why we would like to see more of them. We note with appreciation that over the past years, UN information centers have translated and produced publications in more than 150 languages. We commend these efforts to reach all corners of the world, including the often unreachable. We still see further potential to disseminate UN messages and to go even further in the area of multilingualism, including the use of the social media.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me close by recalling the progress made during the 33rd session for a streamlined and action-oriented resolution on "Questions relating to information". Let us work in the same cooperative spirit during the upcoming session with a view to provide better guidance to DPI allowing it to support the UN's core business of promoting peace and security, development and human rights in effective and cost-neutral manner.

Thank you.

Notes:

- *Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*
- *Iceland continues to be a member of EFTA and the European Economic Area.*