



**COUNCIL OF  
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## **The Council adopts the Guidelines on Freedom of Expression online-offline**

The Council today adopted the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression online and offline, thus bringing a new addition to the family of EU Human Rights Guidelines. With these guidelines, the EU reaffirms the pivotal role that freedom of opinion and expression play in a democratic society.

These freedoms are essential for the fulfilment and enjoyment of a wide range of other human rights, including freedom of association and assembly, freedom of thought, religion or belief, the right to education, the right to take part in cultural life, the right to vote and all other political rights related to participation in public affairs.

Freedom of opinion and expression should be seen both individually, as a means of promoting an individual's self-fulfilment and autonomy as well as collectively, in the context of a free, diverse and independent media. Without freedom of expression and freedom of the media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.

Technological innovations in information technology and communications have created new ways of promoting freedom of expression but have also brought new challenges. The EU is firmly opposed to any unjustified restrictions on the internet and other new media. All human rights which exist offline must also be protected online, in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The Guidelines provide a comprehensive compilation of definitions, covering all aspects of this fundamental right, including the right to hold opinions without interference, the right to seek and receive information and the right to impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media and regardless of frontiers.

# **P R E S S**

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The EU, through these Guidelines, stresses that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is a universal right and applies to all persons equally. States must ensure that their legal systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of opinion and expression to all and can be properly enforced.

When addressing freedom of expression, the EU is engaged to address all operational aspects and areas of importance, such as:

- Combating violence, persecution, harassment and intimidation of individuals, including journalists and other media actors, because of their exercise of their right to freedom of expression online and offline and combating impunity for such crimes
- Promoting laws and practices that protect freedom of opinion and expression
- Promoting media freedom and pluralism and fostering an understanding among public authorities of the dangers of unwarranted interference with impartial/critical reporting.
- Promoting and respecting human rights in cyberspace and other information communication technologies
- Promoting best practices by companies
- Promoting legal amendments and practices aimed at strengthening data protection and privacy online/offline

While pursuing its aims, the EU will make full use of the tools available, such as traditional diplomatic tools (political dialogues, high level visits, public statements and demarches), but also good and effective use of financial instruments available, public diplomacy in multilateral fora and continuous cooperation with regional organisations, such as the Council of Europe and OSCE.

The general aim of the Guidelines is to address unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression, promote media freedom and provide valuable guidance to EU officials and staff across the globe.

Link to the guidelines:

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142549.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142549.pdf)