



German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

661st Meeting of the Permanent Council

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Statement of the European Union on Freedom of Assembly in Russia, following the events on 14 and 15 April in Moscow and St. Petersburg

The European Union is concerned by the disproportionate use of force by Russian law enforcement authorities against peaceful demonstrators and media representatives, both Russian and international, in Moscow and St. Petersburg last Saturday and Sunday, 14 and 15 April. The European Union is also concerned by a number of arbitrary arrests in the context of the above-mentioned events.

The right to assemble peacefully – including the holding of marches - is a cornerstone of pluralistic democracy. It provides an important safeguard of freedom of expression and the right to political participation. The freedoms of assembly and association are essential elements of the OSCE acquis since the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The media must have access to public demonstrations and rallies, including policing operations mounted in the context of such manifestations. Participating States reaffirmed the right of the media to collect, report and disseminate information, news and opinion at the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension in 1991. Media coverage helps ensure that both, organisers of events and law enforcement officials, are held accountable for their conduct.

As an OSCE participating State and member of the United Nations and of the Council of Europe, the Russian Federation has committed itself to allow its citizens to exercise their right to assemble peacefully and express their views without

harassment and interference, and to protect the fundamental right to freedom of expression. The fulfilment of these commitments is of special significance in view of the forthcoming elections in the Russian Federation.

The European Union conducts regular human rights consultations with the Russian Federation and will continue to stress the importance of freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of the media in this framework.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

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