



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement on the issue of Freedom of Association in the Russian Federation

The European Union wishes to highlight its concerns at a recent development in the Russian Federation which again highlights the ever-shrinking space for critical voices through increased restrictions on freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. A succession of legislative changes in the Russian Federation are having a direct effect on the people of that country and restricting their ability to exercise their human rights, in contravention of OSCE commitments. In recent weeks, new legislative steps have been taken in this direction, and we will follow their implementation closely.

At the Permanent Council on 2 June, we made clear our concern about the investigation into human rights defender and Chair of the “Women of the Don Union”, Valentina Cherevatenko. We cautioned that criminal charges against her would mark a dangerous precedent for the criminalisation of peaceful and legitimate human rights activity.

It is therefore with dismay that we have to raise this case again following the decision, communicated on 27 June, to open a criminal case against Ms Cherevatenko under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code. This article was added to the Russian Criminal Code following the adoption of the Foreign Agents Law.

This is the first instance of a criminal prosecution of a human rights defender under this article for alleged violations of the Foreign Agent Law.

We echo the statement issued by the spokesperson of the High Representative and Vice President, Federica Mogherini: that the practice of declaring NGOs to be “foreign agents” cripples civil society and restricts the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

In the Helsinki Final Act, the right of individuals to know and act upon their human rights were set out. Twenty six years ago in Copenhagen, OSCE participating States committed themselves to ensure that individuals are permitted to exercise the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organisations which seek the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We therefore call on the Russian authorities to ensure that Ms. Cherevatenko can continue her work undisturbed for the benefit of Russian society.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.