



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1102
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**EU Statement on Recent Human Rights Developments in
the Russian Federation**

The European Union wishes to highlight its concerns at a number of recent cases and developments in the Russian Federation highlighting the ever-shrinking space for the enjoyment of freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and for critical voices.

On 25 May, journalist Denis Kuchmenko was brutally attacked by two men near his apartment in Bratsk. This incident followed an attack on 11 May in Vologda on Oleg Kunitsyn, who was shot twice with a pistol. There were also attacks in May on opposition politician Alexei Navalny and members of his organisation. According to reports, law enforcement authorities were present but did not intervene to stop the attack. We condemn these attacks. We note that the cases are under investigation but call for all those responsible for the attacks - both perpetrators and instigators – to be brought to justice.

In May, the website Krym.Realii was temporarily blocked after it was accused of publishing materials that contained “justification of sabotage, extremism, and endless slander,” of the so-called “government bodies in Crimea.” Meanwhile a blogger from Tver, Andrei Bubeyev was sentenced to more than two years in prison for reposting an article on social media entitled “Crimea is Ukraine.” Bubeyev was accused of public calls of extremist activities and for actions aimed to undermine Russia’s territorial integrity.

Further concerning developments in the field of media freedom include the decision of RBC to dismiss its three chief editors amid widespread reports of political pressure.

All of these developments represent threats or setbacks for media pluralism and freedom of expression in Russia. Whilst each case is distinct these cases highlight three areas of particular concern.

Firstly, the use of “countering extremism” as an excuse for increasing internet censorship in Russia. Secondly the use of direct or indirect administrative pressure by the Russian authorities on critical media outlets, as appears to be the case for the popular media outlet RBC. Thirdly, that in spite of many investigations, a culture of impunity prevails for attacks on critical political voices. This is further compounded by language from certain public, political and media figures, which can be understood to encourage or endorse such actions. Impunity for such attacks also breeds a climate of fear and self-censorship.

Unfortunately, we continue to see harassment and restrictions on human rights defenders and other critical voices extending beyond the media. On May 25, the non-governmental organization Memorial published an updated list of political prisoners in the Russian Federation. This list, based on rigorous research and strict criteria, contains 87 names – an increase from 50 names in October 2015. The latest list includes individuals who have participated in public protests, such as the Bolotnaya demonstrations and activists advocating for housing rights and on environmental issues.

Also on the list are Ukrainian citizens, including a number of Crimean Tatars, who are detained in Russia. Among the Ukrainian citizens on the list are Mykola Karpiuk and Stanislav Klykh, who on 26 May were sentenced to 22 and half and 20 years respectively in a penal colony for allegedly killing Russian soldiers in the first Chechen War. We consider their trial to have been in breach of elementary

standards of justice and it raises again serious concerns about the respect for the principles of rule of law and human rights in Russia. While we welcome the release of Nadya Savchenko we continue to call for the release of all other illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia.

Despite earlier explanations provided in the Permanent Council, we remain deeply concerned by Russia's "foreign agents" law and "undesirable organizations" law and the way they are being used to restrict the work of human rights activists and civil society more generally. The recent interrogation by Russia's Investigative Committee of human rights activist and President of "Women of the Don" Valentina Cherevatenko in connection with the "foreign agents" law is particularly concerning. Should a formal investigation be opened against her, it would be the first criminal case opened under the "foreign agents" law, and establish a dangerous new precedent for criminalisation of peaceful and legitimate human rights activity.

Another concerning development is the listing of "Hansebüro Kaliningrad" as a 'foreign agent'. Hansebüro's sole purpose is to promote the cooperation of the regions of Kaliningrad and the German federal state of Schleswig-Holstein in the economic, cultural, social and legal sphere. The usefulness of this institution and of its work has until now never been put into question by Russia, and its listing as a foreign agent sets a further negative precedent in the application of this law. Also of concern is the listing in 2015 of the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad as 'foreign agents'.

We call on Russia to urgently address the issues we have raised, including with concrete actions to reverse violations of OSCE commitments, and to facilitate the enjoyment by all citizens in their country of their fundamental freedoms and human rights. We stand ready to engage in further dialogue with Russia on these and other human rights issues of concern.

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.