



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N°1124 Vienna, 15 December 2016

EU Statement on the occasion of Human Rights Day

On 10 December, the European Union and its Member States celebrate Human Rights Day. As inequality and violations of human rights pose increasing challenges across the world, it is all the more important that we redouble our efforts to defend the rights of all individuals. The signal sent from the Parallel Civil Society Conference, which took place last week in Hamburg, is loud and clear: in parts of the OSCE region there are increasing restrictions on civil society and a crackdown on human rights, including the fundamental freedoms of expression and opinion, of association and peaceful assembly, and of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

This is why this year we join the United Nations in calling upon people to stand up for someone's rights.

We commend all individuals and organisations that work tirelessly to ensure that the participating States implement our OSCE commitments on human rights and who hold governments to account. We speak here of civil society organisations, large and small, local, national and international, and also courageous individuals who step forward to defend human rights. We can draw inspiration from human rights defenders, who bravely face increasing pressure and threats in many countries, including in the OSCE area. The European Union resolves to protect them, and to promote civil society space. They deserve our recognition and our deepest thanks.

Whilst individual action is essential, the European Union as a whole will continue to play a leading role in promoting a rules-based global order, with respect for human rights at its core. The EU remains a vocal advocate for human rights in multilateral fora and lends its full support to the UN human rights system, which is fundamental to protecting universal human rights and monitoring compliance.

In this context, our OSCE commitments are more relevant than ever and we call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations. We will continue to work on strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and to advance the implementation of our commitments in this regard. Despite some progress made, it is deeply regrettable that we were not able to adopt any of the eight Decisions tabled in the Third Dimension at the Ministerial Council in Hamburg. We need to continue our work in the upcoming years. We welcome the incoming Austrian Chairmanship's focus on strengthening democracy and human rights.

Today and every day, the EU will continue to stand up for human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide, and will commit its full support to every individual who does the same.

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

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