



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1456 Vienna, 14 December 2023

EU Statement on the International Human Rights Day and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

1. On 10 December, we celebrated Human Rights Day. This year marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasising the principle that all human beings are born free and equal, with fundamental rights that are to be universally protected as a foundation for freedom, justice, and peace in the world. We also marked the 30th year of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the 25th year of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
2. Sadly, the undermining of democracy, systematic human rights violations, and violent repression of democratic forces continue to take place throughout the OSCE area. No participating State is immune to intolerance, the degradation of democracy, the undermining of the rule of law and the erosion of human rights. Some participating States adopt and implement legislation and policies that obstruct the work of civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders, or create legislative obstacles to the formation and functioning of civil society.
3. To counter these alarming trends, we commend the work of the autonomous institutions in supporting participating States in upholding their human rights commitments. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the protection and advancement of fundamental freedoms and human rights.
4. In this regard, we remain concerned by increasing discrimination and repression of independent voices in the Russian Federation, and we strongly condemn the decision of the Russian Supreme Court to outlaw what it calls the 'international LGBT public movement' as 'extremist' and to ban its activity on the territory of the Russian Federation. This politically-motivated decision aims at further persecuting the LGBTIQ community in Russia and aims to stifle civil society and those courageously

defending human rights. The EU firmly opposes any form of discrimination, prejudice and hate. We stand in solidarity with Russian citizens and all those who are adversely affected by this decision. We are also deeply disturbed by reports of repeated ill-treatment, harassment and physical and psychological torture by Russian prison authorities. We remain extremely concerned about the health conditions of Vladimir Kara-Murza, Alexandra Skochilenko and Alexei Gorinov, as well as Alexei Navalny whose whereabouts remain unknown. We call on Russian authorities for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

5. Further, we deplore the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, where persecutions and repression are ongoing. This is most recently exemplified by attacks on representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and their families by the Lukashenka regime. We condemn the recent attacks and the systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations that have been and continue to be committed in Belarus. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily detained persons, including political prisoners, lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists and media workers, such as Ales Bialiatski, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Viktor Babaryka, Maria Kolesnikova, Nastya Loika, Ihar and Darya Losik and Andrzej Poczobut, among many others.
6. Finally, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, enabled by the Lukashenka regime, serves as a stark reminder that internal repression and external aggression go hand in hand. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is a prerequisite for lasting security and peace among and within states.
7. Three independent reports under the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism have documented an unprecedented decline in the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We continue to be appalled by the reports of blatant human rights violations committed by Russia's Armed Forces in Ukraine, including, the use of torture, sexual and gender-based violence and other ill-treatment, as well as abductions and forced deportations of civilians, including children. We commend ODIHR's contribution in documenting these crimes in its recently issued fourth report and reiterate firmly that those responsible must and will be held to account.
8. The Skopje Parallel Civil Society Conference, as well as the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, addressed many of these challenges, including the violent

crackdown on civil society and the ever-growing number of political prisoners in Belarus and the Russian Federation. We highly value the individuals and organisations that seek to hold all participating States to account in the implementation of their OSCE commitments on human rights.

9. We commend – and stand in solidarity with – all human rights defenders who bravely face pressure, intimidation, reprisals, and attacks in many countries, including in the OSCE area. The imprisonment and sentencing of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize Winner Ales Bialiatski, founder of Viasna, is but one example of such reprisals. There are now more than 1500 political prisoners in Belarus, and, like Yuri Dmitriev of the Nobel Peace Prize Winner Memorial, over 600 in Russia.
10. We will continue to call on all OSCE participating States to live up to their international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments, making full use of the OSCE's ample capacities and toolbox. We will continue to speak out against the shrinking civic space, intimidation and reprisals against civil society and human rights defenders across the region. Because human rights are inalienable and security is comprehensive. Because human rights are not mere words on paper; they are obligations as well as universally applicable legal norms. They are the foundation of peace and the avenue toward a more just, equal and inclusive society for today, tomorrow, and generations to come.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.