

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council N° 1174
Vienna, 1 February 2018**

**EU Statement on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of
Peaceful Assembly in Russia**

The EU has previously expressed its concerns regarding the worrying trend with respect to media freedom in the Russian Federation. We deeply regret that new measures are once again underway targeting independent voices in Russian society.

A draft law, which passed its first reading in the State Duma on 12 January, introduces amendments that would extend the status of "foreign agents" to individuals. Anyone who publishes information online and receives any kind of financial or other assets including salaries, incomes, advertising revenues or gifts from abroad could be considered as "media/foreign agent", including individual journalists, bloggers, experts, or other persons expressing themselves on social media. In addition, the draft imposes additional demands on media outlets branded as "foreign agents", requiring them to first establish Russian legal entities in order to be allowed to disseminate information in Russia. The draft law also introduces amendments allowing for blocking of access to entire web platforms without prior court order if the relevant "foreign agent" notification is missing.

The EU echoes the concerns of Harlem Désir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that this draft law represents a disproportionate interference in freedom of expression and media freedom that may also have a considerable chilling effect, and that it should not be adopted. We have raised many times our concerns over Russia's "foreign agent" legislation, which goes against Russia's international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments. The proposed additional measures would aggravate the already serious situation in Russia with regard to freedom of expression and media freedom, which is particularly concerning given the upcoming presidential election. The EU welcomes the work of Mr. Désir and we call on Russia to draw on the expertise and advice of the Representative.

We are also concerned by the large numbers of individuals who were detained before and during protests across Russia on 28 January. Media and civil society reports indicated that more than 350 persons were detained. The detentions took place against a backdrop of continuous harassment against the protest organizers, most recently police raiding a campaign headquarters in St. Petersburg.

We take this opportunity to remind the Russian delegation that all participating states freely committed in Copenhagen in 1990 to respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. This right, together with the right to freedom of association and freedom of expression are essential to a functioning democracy including during pre-election periods and we call on the Russian authorities to ensure full respect for these rights.

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, GEORGIA and CANADA align themselves with this statement.

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