



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1209 Vienna, 13 December 2018

EU Statement on the occasion of the Human Rights Day

This year, on 10 December, we marked the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration has proven to be the cornerstone of international human rights law on which many countries have built a strong and resilient human rights architecture. Its first article captures its very essence: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent.

The European Union has joined the United Nations and many others in calling upon states and people to stand up for human rights. We reaffirm our commitment to protect and promote human rights whenever they are violated or questioned, inside or outside our borders.

We cannot take human rights for granted. We know the struggles that are still taking place across the world, also in the OSCE area: the human rights violations, the undermining of democracy and the shrinking space for civil society. The Parallel Civil Society Conference, which took place last week in Milan, addressed, once more, many of these challenges. We welcome the report and recommendations presented by the participants of the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference 2018 and reaffirm the importance of continued cooperation with and participation of civil society organisations in OSCE activities.

The European Union will keep being at the side of those who stand up for human rights every day. 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, or 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. They deserve our recognition and our deepest thanks. Support for human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is at the core of the EU's external human rights policy and one of its major priorities. The EU is the leading worldwide donor to local civil society organisations, providing €2 billion each year, two thirds of the global support.

We also commend the work of the OSCE autonomous institutions, ODIHR, the HCNM and the RFOM, for their efforts to promote human rights, as essential contributors to comprehensive security. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential for the protection and advancement of fundamental freedoms and human rights.

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, we warmly welcome the adoption of the decision on safety of journalists, after the extensive efforts of the past years, by subsequent Chairmanships. Considering the particular importance the European Union attaches to freedom of expression and media freedom, we have put a lot of efforts in the negotiation process of this Decision with a view of reaching consensus among 57. We also welcome the adoption of the cross-dimensional Decision on preventing and combating violence against women, which remains a major issue within the OSCE area.

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. By doing so, we continue to honour the commitment made 70 years ago, at the heart of which lie the fundamental fact that all human beings are born free and equal, and the notion that we all need to act in a spirit of respect and solidarity.

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, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO 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.