



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on Human Rights Day

On 10 December, the European Union and its Member States celebrate Human Rights Day. Ever since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, civil society and human rights defenders have contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights through peaceful dialogue and building pluralistic democracies.

In many places in the world, citizens are mobilising in favour of human rights. Human rights defenders are taking to the streets to demand respect for their rights: civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Young people in particular have been more and more active in standing up for their rights and their future.

The European Union launched last year the ‘Good Human Rights Stories’ initiative - showing that promoting and respecting human rights allow our societies to grow stronger and more resilient.

While reflecting on these stories can be a source of hope and optimism, 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. States continue to adopt and implement legislation and policies obstructing the work of civil society and human rights defenders: laws which restrict access to finance, which label NGOs as “foreign agents” or “undesirable organisations” or otherwise stigmatise them, or which place legislative obstacles to the formation and functioning of civil society run counter to international standards and OSCE commitments. They have a chilling effect on civil society and on the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

The Parallel Civil Society Conference, which took place last week in Bratislava, addressed, once more, many of these challenges, in particular with regard to freedom of peaceful assembly and environmental defenders. We welcome the report and recommendations presented by the participants of the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference 2019 and reaffirm the importance of continued cooperation with and participation of civil society organisations in OSCE activities.

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, intimidation, threats and attacks 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.

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 European Union will continue to reaffirm its commitment to protect and promote the universality of human rights whenever they are violated or questioned, inside or outside its borders. We will continue to work to advance the implementation of our OSCE commitments and we call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations.

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 REPUBLIC of NORTH 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, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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