



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1247 Vienna, 14 November 2019

EU Statement on the Human Rights developments in the Russian Federation

The European Union expresses its concern regarding the latest human rights developments in the Russian Federation, in particular as concerns the right to freedoms of association, of peaceful assembly and of expression, and of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

At the request of the Ministry of Justice, courts in the Russian Federation have recently ruled to dissolve the movement *For Human Rights*, which is one of the oldest human rights organisations in the country, and the *Centre of Support for Indigenous Peoples of the North*. The right to the freedom of association is an essential prerequisite to any democratic society and facilitates the fulfilment of many other rights. The Russian Federation continues its crackdown on civil society organisations, as further proved by the recent decision to ban the internationally recognised Czech humanitarian NGO *People in Need* from working in Russia. These worrying developments go against an independent and active civil society, which is an essential element to every democracy.

The right to freedom of association is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, firmly rooted in OSCE human dimension commitments and enshrined in the Russian constitution. In Copenhagen 1990, the OSCE participating States committed “to ensure that individuals are permitted to exercise the right to association, including the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organizations which seek the

promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including trade unions and human rights monitoring groups". We expect Russia to abide by its international obligations and OSCE commitments and therefore ensure that civil society organisations are able to contribute fully to Russia's development.

We continue to follow closely the ongoing politically motivated trials of the persons detained during the summer protests and we remain concerned about the disproportionate sentences issued so far. Arbitrary detentions and excessive sentences for people taking part in peaceful protests and freely expressing their opinions question the respect for fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Russian constitution, OSCE commitments and other international obligations.

The European Union continues to be deeply concerned about the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in the Russian Federation. A number of members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia are facing systemic persecution, including arbitrary detentions, criminal investigations and heavy sentences. As we have stated previously in many other occasions, all people, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of religion or belief as well as freedom of association and peaceful assembly without discrimination, as guaranteed by the constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's international obligations and OSCE commitments.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, 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.

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