



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1502 Vienna, 12 December 2024

EU Statement on the International Human Rights Day

1. On 10 December, on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the European Union's unwavering commitment to the universal respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights for everyone, everywhere. This year's theme, *Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now*, underscores the necessity of safeguarding rights and freedoms for a just, resilient, and sustainable future — leaving no one behind.
2. Therefore, it is with deep regret that we note a shrinking space for civil society across a number of OSCE states, where legislation and policies are increasingly obstructing the work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders. In countering these alarming trends, we commend the work of the autonomous institutions in supporting participating States in upholding their human rights commitments and obligations. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the protection and advancement of fundamental freedoms and human rights.
3. We remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Russia. We condemn the systematic crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including attacks and repression against political opposition, peaceful protestors, independent journalists, and other media actors. Russia must immediately and unconditionally release all those imprisoned on politically motivated charges in Russia and arbitrarily and illegally detained in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the three OSCE officials - Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov.
4. We are gravely concerned by the findings of the 2024 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report regarding the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians. The report detailed allegations of “widespread and systematic” violations by the Russian

authorities and concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has also concluded that it has sufficient evidence to determine that Russian authorities have acted pursuant to a coordinated state policy and have therefore committed crimes against humanity of torture. We salute ODIHR's contribution in documenting these crimes and reiterate that those responsible must and will be held to account.

5. Meanwhile in Belarus, the Lukashenka regime continues its crackdown on human rights to stifle opposition and silence independent voices. Individuals attempting to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms continue to be subjected to intimidation, harassment, abuse and arbitrary detention, including acts of transnational repression while in exile. Despite the pardon granted to 200 individuals, close to 1300 political prisoners remain in detention in Belarus, including Sergei Tsikhanouski, Ihar Losik, Maria Kalesnikava, Mikalai Statkevich, Maksim Znak and Viktor Babaryka. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily detained persons and their effective rehabilitation.
6. We share the assessment by ODIHR that “the action of law enforcement officials while policing peaceful protests in Georgia is [...] a serious breach of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.” As noted by ODIHR, “all OSCE participating States have committed to upholding this right and guaranteeing freedom of peaceful assembly both in law and practice.”
7. In Azerbaijan, in recent months, there has been an unsettling rise of arrests of independent journalists, human rights defenders, and political activists on politically motivated charges. The EU continues to call on Azerbaijan to release all those imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights, and to ensure dignified and safe conditions for detainees, including their full access to health and independent legal services.
8. The Valletta 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 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.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA* and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and 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.