

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1139th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

30 March 2017

On banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

The European Union is concerned at the latest developments regarding Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. The decision by the Ministry of Justice to suspend the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Ministry's application to the Supreme Court to have their Administrative Centre declared "extremist", its activities prohibited and the Centre dissolved mark a new stage in the harassment and legal persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

The consequences for the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia could be severe: confiscation of their places of worship, dissolution of nearly 400 legal entities and criminal prosecution for each of the more than 170,000 Jehovah's Witnesses. These legal proceedings would be motivated by the simple fact that they meet to practise their religion.

The EU calls on Russia to respect its international commitments regarding freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The OSCE participating States have repeatedly affirmed the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a pillar of the concept of inclusive security.

The EU continues to promote freedom of religion or belief, a right that should be exercised everywhere by all, on the basis of the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Norway, as well as Ukraine, Georgia, Canada and Australia, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.