



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement – Plenary session 4 Fundamental Freedoms II

1. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association and Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief are fundamental to open and democratic societies. They are essential for the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations engaged in human rights advocacy, including National Human Rights Institutions.
2. Under no circumstances should participating States unduly restrict the right to peaceful assemblies, for example on the grounds that they do not agree with the opinions expressed by those wishing to demonstrate. Peaceful assemblies are an opportunity to facilitate the expression of diverse opinions, including unpopular or minority opinions. Unfortunately, the right of peaceful assembly and association is being unduly limited and restricted in the OSCE region. As highlighted by the recent Moscow Mechanism reports on Belarus and Russia, violations are particularly widespread in these participating States and in the Ukrainian territories illegally occupied by Russia.
3. In Russia, as underlined by the Moscow Mechanism report, demonstrations have been made de facto impossible, and drastic measures to suppress opposing voices have created a climate of fear and intimidation. The EU strongly condemns Russia's continued use of repressive legislation and politically motivated trials, especially the use of laws regarding so-called "foreign agents" and "extremist organisations", as well as laws on "fake news" and "discreditation" of the Russian Armed Forces, which run counter to Russia's legal obligations under international human rights law and OSCE commitments, and result in an appalling increase of the number of political prisoners. The EU stands in

solidarity with those who strive for an open and democratic Russia, and those who want Russia to end its illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine.

4. The EU also remains deeply concerned regarding the situation of human rights in Belarus. As laid out by the Moscow Mechanism report, the right to freedom of assembly and association has been severely violated through the repression of peaceful demonstrations, the destruction of a large part of civil society, and the targeting of independent trade unions, independent political parties, associations, as well as their leaders, thus forming “a coherent whole revealing an overall policy”.
5. We call on Belarus to repeal laws and regulations that unduly restrict the formation and operation of independent organisations, including associations, labour unions, political parties, and other civil society groups. The EU will stand with Belarusians as long as it takes on their path towards democracy and freedom.
6. Hatred against persons from particular religious or belief communities often goes hand in hand with other manifestations of intolerance. Violence and discrimination do not only harm the individuals and communities concerned, but can also jeopardize security across the OSCE region. The EU encourages all participating States to strengthen efforts to protect the freedom of thought, religion or belief for all, and ensure that this right is guaranteed through comprehensive legislation and implementation.
7. In Copenhagen 1990, the participating States pledged to “facilitate the establishment and strengthening of independent national institutions in the area of human rights and the rule of law”. Since the 1990s, the number of NRHIs in the OSCE region has grown consistently, providing an essential contribution in the promotion and protection of human rights, including through the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI). Yet, more and more NHRIs are working in a difficult national environment. The EU urges all participating States to step up efforts to establish a NHRI in line with the UN Paris Principles and to strengthen the enabling environment for existing NHRIs. We encourage all participating States to make use of ODIHR’s guidance and expertise in that regard.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as 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.