

JOINT STATEMENT FOLLOWING UP THE VIENNA MECHANISM ON REPORTS OF ARBITRARY AND UNJUST DETENTIONS IN RUSSIA

The following statement was made on behalf of the following invoking states: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States

Mr. Chairperson,

On Thursday 22nd of March, Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States expressed deep concern regarding severe human rights violations occurring in the Russian Federation.

By invoking the Vienna (Human Dimension) Mechanism and highlighting the obligations of the Russian Federation under this Mechanism, the aligned countries requested concrete and substantial responses to seven questions regarding arbitrary or unjust arrests and detentions in Russia, the targeting of political opposition members, as well as torture and mistreatment in Russian detention facilities and prisons.

Regrettably, the Russian Federation has not responded in accordance with the commitments of the Vienna Mechanism within the 10-day deadline. In fact, it has now been 27 days without any response.

The world does not yet know exactly what transpired in the final hours before the death of Alexei Navalny. Navalny's legacy of courageous advocacy against corruption and for a free and democratic Russia continues to resonate. Many imprisoned members of the opposition remain incarcerated and their lives are still in grave danger. Among those at great risk is Vladimir Kara-Murza, a human rights activist, politician, journalist, and historian who has survived two poisoning attempts and who serves a 25-year prison term in inhumane conditions and without access to urgent medical care.

Another prisoner, Ilya Yashin, was sentenced in December 2022 to eight-and-a-half years in prison for statements he made on his YouTube channel about reported war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian armed forces in the city of Bucha in Ukraine's Kyiv region. In February 2024, Russia's Ministry of Justice designated Oleg Orlov as a so-called "foreign agent", citing his opposition to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and accusing him of spreading "false information" about the government's actions. Later that month, a Moscow court found Orlov guilty, sentencing him to two years and six months in a penal colony for allegedly "discrediting" the Russian army.

Sadly, these are only a few examples of the continued widespread and systematic suppression of independent voices by Russian authorities. We call on Russia to immediately and unconditionally release all arbitrarily detained persons.

We remain gravely concerned about reports of escalated and politically motivated prosecution based on ambiguous claims such as "extremism" and "false information". The growing complexity

within the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, the Law on Associations, and the Code of Administrative Offences—coupled with credible reports of torture and ill-treatment in Russian places of detention—demands our close attention.

In reference to relevant OSCE commitments, including the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document, the 1990 CSCE/OSCE Copenhagen Document, the 1991 Document of the Moscow meeting of the conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, the 2004 Sofia Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combating Torture, the 2006 Brussels Declaration on Criminal Justice Systems, and the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Decision on the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, we urgently request that the Russian Federation provide concrete and substantial responses to our questions without any further delay. We remind that all OSCE participating States have agreed that commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.

The silence from the Russian Federation is not in line with OSCE commitments in the field of the human dimension. Let me therefore emphasize that we will persist in seeking answers to our concerns by exploring relevant meetings, mechanisms, and committees available to us within the OSCE structures and other multilateral arenas.

I thank you.