



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1295 Vienna, 10 December 2020

EU Statement on the International Human Rights Day

On 10 December, we celebrate Human Rights Day to mark the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the contribution of civil society and human rights defenders to the promotion and protection of human rights through peaceful dialogue and building pluralistic democracies. This year's theme, *Recover better – stand up for human rights*, relates to the COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on the need to build back better by ensuring human rights are central to recovery efforts.

In this crisis, protecting people's lives and health is the top priority of our governments. We recognize the urgency and necessity of the preventive measures implemented in many countries to effectively fight the pandemic. At the same time, we have to make sure that the efforts in response to the global crisis do not have far-reaching repercussions on the enjoyment of human rights.

Thirty years since the adoption of the Copenhagen Document and the Paris Charter, the fundamental freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, religion or belief also in digital contexts, are as important as ever, and must be further protected. Lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, free and independent media, democracy and the rule of law. Yet, the undermining of democracy, grave systematic human rights violations and violent repression against representatives of the democratic opposition continue to take place in the OSCE area. States continue to adopt and implement legislation and policies obstructing the work of civil society, journalists and human rights

defenders, or putting legislative obstacles to the formation and functioning of civil society. These actions have a chilling effect on civil society and on the exercise of fundamental freedoms and run counter to international standards and OSCE commitments.

The series of online events organized by the Civic Solidarity Platform between 7 and 14 December in lieu of the traditional OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference, addressed, once more, many of these challenges. We reaffirm the importance of continued cooperation with and participation of civil society organizations in OSCE events.

We reaffirm our strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The establishment of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime is a landmark initiative to underscore the EU's determination to enhance its role in addressing serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide. Realising the effective enjoyment of human rights by everyone is a strategic goal of the EU. Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights are fundamental values of the EU and the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

We commend all individuals and organisations that work to ensure that the participating States implement our OSCE commitments on human rights and hold governments to account. We can draw inspiration from human rights defenders, who bravely face pressure, intimidation, reprisals and attacks in many countries, including in the OSCE area. They deserve our recognition and our appreciation. Support for human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is at the core of the EU's external human rights policy and one of its major priorities.

The EU welcomes the work of the autonomous institutions ODIHR, HCNM and RFOM in supporting participating States in upholding their human rights commitments. They are major contributors to comprehensive security within the OSCE region. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the protection and advancement of fundamental freedoms and human rights. We welcome the appointment of Maria Teresa Ribeiro as the RFOM, Kairat Abdrakhmanov as the HCNM and Matteo Mecacci as the Director of ODIHR. We look forward to working with them in their new capacities.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to protect and promote the universality of human rights and will continue to stand up for human rights whenever they are violated or questioned, inside or outside its borders. We will continue to work to advance the implementation of our OSCE commitments and we call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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