



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1349 Vienna, 16 December 2021

#### EU Statement on “International Human Rights Day”

1. On 10 December, we celebrated Human Rights Day, marking the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the remarkable contribution of civil society and human rights defenders to the promotion and protection of human rights through peaceful dialogue and pluralistic democracies.
2. The theme of this year’s Human Rights Day, *equality - reducing inequalities, advancing human rights*, relates to one of the most basic human rights: that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The EU, including through its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, remains committed to eliminating inequalities, discrimination and exclusion. We remain fully engaged in i.a. promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.
3. This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE’s landmark Moscow Document. A lot has happened since then, not least due to new digital technologies that are now part of our everyday lives for good or ill. However, the fight for human rights and fundamental freedoms continues to be as relevant as it was 30 years ago, and there is a need for ensuring further protection of these rights and principles, online and offline. The EU deeply regrets that it was not possible to reach consensus on the draft decision on Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age, which would have contributed to strengthening our OSCE commitments in a timely manner.
4. Lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, 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,

human rights defenders, journalists and other media actors and independent voices, or putting legislative obstacles to the formation and functioning of civil society organisations. These actions have a chilling effect on civic space and on the exercise of fundamental freedoms and run counter to international standards and OSCE commitments.

5. The OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference, held on the margins of the Stockholm Ministerial Council, addressed many of these challenges. We reaffirm the importance of continued cooperation with and participation of civil society organizations in OSCE events. We commend all individuals and organisations that work to ensure that the participating States implement their OSCE commitments on human rights and hold governments to account. We thank the CiO for its relentless and inclusive efforts to adopt the needed HDIM Decisions.
6. 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 appreciation. Support for human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is at the core of the EU's external human rights policy.
7. The EU commends 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.
8. The recent prolongation of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime underscores the EU's determination to enhance its role in addressing serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide. We will continue to call on OSCE participating States to live up to their international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments, as well as to speak up against the shrinking space, intimidation and reprisals against civil society and human rights defenders across the region.

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, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and MONACO align themselves with this statement.

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