



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1216
Vienna, 7 February 2019**

**EU Statement on the Application of Criminal Charges
against Anastasia Shevchenko under the Law on
'Undesirable Organisations' in Russia**

The EU is concerned by the initiation of criminal charges against Anastasia Shevchenko, a Coordinator with the movement Open Russia, in the Russian Federation under the law on 'undesirable organisations'. On 21 January, Shevchenko was charged with "repeated participation in the activities of an undesirable organisation". This is the first criminal case to be brought under this legislation; previously violations were treated as an administrative offence.

The EU previously raised concerns at the Permanent Council over the introduction of the 'undesirable organisations' legislation in 2015, and then again in 2017 and 2018 following the inclusion of a number of civil society organisations in the register of 'undesirable organisations'. We remain concerned that this legislation restricts freedom of association and freedom of expression, and limits the space for civil society in Russia, contrary to the commitments we all made in Copenhagen in 1990.

Laws which restrict access to finance, which label NGOs as "foreign agents" or "undesirable organisations" or otherwise stigmatise them, or which place legislative obstacles to the formation and functioning of civil society run counter to international standards and OSCE commitments. They have a chilling effect on civil society and on the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Such measures also curb an open and public debate in society and hinder development and progress.

We therefore reiterate our strong concern over the use of this legislation to criminalise the actions of civil society and human rights defenders in Russia.

In addition, we understand that the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation has asked the Prosecutor General to investigate the legality of the charges against her.

We ask the Russian Delegation for clarification of the charges against Ms Shevchenko, particularly in relation to her work with the Russia-based civil society organisation, the movement Open Russia. We reiterate the importance of a vibrant civil society for any democratic society as well as an asset in itself. We expect that the charges will be dropped immediately and Ms Shevchenko's house arrest will be brought to an end.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA and CANADA align themselves with this statement.

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