



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 992 Vienna, 27 March 2014

---

#### EU Statement on Russia

---

Mr. Chairman,

The European Union has regularly expressed its concern about the overall deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Russia. A free and open public debate and a free flow of information and ideas are especially important in times of crisis – and never more so than now. However, the trend in Russia is in the opposite direction, and has been further strengthened in recent weeks.

Censorship of the internet is just one example of the increasing limitations on the freedom of expression in Russia. Last week, the blog of the Russian anti-corruption activist and opposition politician, Alexey Navalny, was blocked for alleged 'extremism' after he had called for friendly ties with Ukraine and compliance with international law. Several other websites have also been blocked as well. Censorship of the internet goes against our OSCE Commitments. We recall that in Sofia in 2004 we committed to 'take action to ensure that the internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression'.

Among other examples of the mounting pressure on those who openly disagree with government policies, we note the case of Professor Andrey Zubov of Moscow State University for International Affairs, who was dismissed for publishing an essay critical of Russia's annexation of Crimea. We also note the police investigation for possible extremism of Vologda journalist Roman Romanenko for posting on Facebook a satirical appeal to defend the rights of

the Russian-speaking population in his region. We heard the Russian delegation's response last week concerning the background of the recent dismissal of Galina Timchenko, Editor-in-Chief of the popular news site lenta.ru. But we continue to be struck that this came after the state media regulator had issued the website with a warning for publishing material of an 'extremist nature' following a recent interview with Dmytro Yarosh, leader of the Ukrainian nationalist party Right Sector.

These are some examples of how existing anti-extremism legislation has been used to stifle domestic dissent. This not only contradicts Russia's freedom of expression commitments, but also dilutes the meaning of the concept of extremism. Such steps also deflect attention from the real manifestations of extremism in Russia.

Mr. Chairman, according to preliminary data from the Russian NGO 'Sova Center for Information and Analysis' for the year 2013 xenophobic or neo-Nazi attacks in 32 regions of Russia resulted in 20 deaths and injuries to no fewer than 173 people. Since the beginning of this year a further six people have been killed and eight injured as a result of racist and xenophobic violence. Last year, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) similarly noted with concern the high incidence of racially motivated violence in the Russian Federation, directed predominantly against non-Slavs, as well as an increasing use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric by public figures in Russia. The use of Nazi slogans and symbols during the annual so-called Russian Marches on 4 November is another warning of the extremist attitudes present in Russian society.

The Russian Federation has repeatedly expressed its concerns about these issues in other countries. These issues are of course a concern for many OSCE states to a greater or lesser degree. We note that the Russian delegation recognised some of the problems in Russia in its statement last

week on the Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We urge Russia to do its utmost to combat extremism in Russian society, including by ensuring that public figures refrain from statements that can be seen as fuelling it.

The European Union is also concerned about limitations on the freedom of assembly and association in Russia. Over the past weeks, Russian authorities have detained hundreds of peaceful protesters in Moscow, during protests against Russia's military intervention in Crimea and during small demonstrations and other gatherings to support the demonstrators involved in the Bolotnaya Square events in Russia on 6 May 2012. In addition, and since March 2013, the Russian Federation has embarked on a large scale campaign to identify advocacy groups and force them to register as 'foreign agents'. Dozens of NGOs have been confronted with legal actions against them, suspending their work for months or longer.

The right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association are at the core of any functioning democracy and are set out clearly in a range of CSCE and OSCE undertakings, not least the 1990 Copenhagen Document. Recent developments contribute to an ongoing chilling effect on the enjoyment of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and have the effect of controlling, weakening, and limiting civil society. The state has a positive obligation to facilitate and protect peaceful assembly. Any restrictions must be proportional and as non-intrusive as possible. As with the other areas we have addressed today, the Russian Federation must ensure that its actions are consistent with the OSCE commitments which it has chosen to take on.

Mr Chairman, the OSCE is built on commitments agreed by all of us. The respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in particular is one of the key principles of the Helsinki Final Act, defining the basics of security and cooperation in Europe. Undermining these principles threatens our common security. We therefore strongly urge the Russian Federation to abide by its

commitments and bring its laws and practices into accordance with international standards. Thank you.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\* and ICELAND+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate ALBANIA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

\* Montenegro continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.