



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1128 Vienna, 19 January 2017

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#### **EU statement on continued inclusion of civil society organisations in the register of “foreign agents” in the Russian Federation**

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The European Union and its Member States wish to highlight their concern over the continued inclusion of civil society organisations in the register of “foreign agents” in Russia, and the shrinking space in which non-governmental organisations have to operate.

Over 150 organisations have now been labelled as “foreign agents”, with many added since we last raised this issue at the Permanent Council. On 23 December, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Michael Link, expressed his alarm at a district court’s ruling to confirm the inclusion of human rights group “Memorial” International Society in the register of “foreign agents”. We echo his concern, and draw attention to the valuable work this organisation has undertaken over many years in the pursuit of truth and justice for all those who suffered persecution and oppression in the Soviet Union.

Memorial International Society joins other organisations that have worked tirelessly for the benefit of Russian society, on diverse issues. Recent additions to the long list of organisations that have been branded as “foreign agents” include: the Anna Centre which works against domestic violence; a Krasnodar regional charitable public organisation called “the Southern Human Rights Centre”; the Sverdlovsk region branch of Memorial; the “Sova Centre for Information and Analysis” which conducts research on topics such as xenophobia and political radicalism; a Sverdlovsk regional public organisation promoting legal migration “Nelegalov.Net”; “Project April”, which works on HIV prevention; and “Bellona Saint Petersburg” an environmental NGO.

We call on the Russian government to align its policies and legislation with the human rights obligations and commitments that it has undertaken and to stop stigmatising civil

society organisations by branding them as “foreign agents”. Russian citizens should be able to exercise their freedom of association effectively and non-governmental organisations should operate in an environment conducive to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We wish to highlight our deep concern over threats made by the Speaker of the Chechen parliament against the human rights journalist and editor-in-chief of the “Caucasian Knot”, Grigoriy Shvedov. We are also concerned by the case of the “Caucasian Knot” journalist Zhalaudi Geriev, whose sentence to 3 years in prison from September 2016 was upheld on 28 December 2016 by the Supreme Court of Chechnya. The Representative on Freedom of the Media mentioned reports alleging that the conviction is in retaliation for his journalistic work. Mr. Geriev’s conviction is part of a series of persecutions and threats launched against the representatives of news outlet “Caucasian Knot”. We call on the Russian authorities to ensure that all journalists are able to carry out their activities free of restrictions and without fear of reprisals, anywhere in Russia.

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 align themselves with this statement.

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