



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council 1428 Vienna, 8 June 2023

#### EU Statement in reply to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Volker Türk

1. The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Mr Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and thank him for addressing the Permanent Council.
2. Marking the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 30 years after the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action by the World Conference on Human Rights, we thank you for outlining the Human Rights 75 initiative, which we fully support. The EU reaffirms its unequivocal commitment to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights and to defend their universality. The EU stands united as a staunch supporter of the UN human rights system, and will continue to actively uphold and defend all human rights as a priority of its external action. We underline that human rights are an essential element of resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. The EU will continue to use all instruments at its disposal, including the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions regime to bring about positive change and improve the situation of human rights worldwide.
3. We thank you, High Commissioner Türk, and your team for your dedicated work and comprehensive reporting on the human rights situation in all parts of the OSCE area. We, in the EU, are aware that we are not immune to challenges.
4. We particularly value your recent reports on the human rights situation in Ukraine, resulting from Russia's brutal, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, including on the issue of the treatment of prisoners of war. Mr. High Commissioner, we share your dismay over the

magnitude of civilian casualties and scale of destruction. This blatant violation of international law, including the UN Charter, has caused immense suffering to the people of Ukraine, a sovereign and independent country, as well as to people around the world, and challenged the entire rules-based international order.

5. We condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We urge Russia to immediately stop its ongoing war of aggression and withdraw all its forces, proxies and military equipment, completely and unconditionally, from the entire territory of Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. We urge Russia to uphold international law, including international humanitarian law.
6. We deplore the loss of life and human suffering. We have witnessed appalling deliberate attacks by the Russian forces on civilians and critical and civilian infrastructure that are war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity. The EU expresses outrage at the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and sexual and gender-based violence. Ukrainians, including children, who have been forcibly transferred within territories temporarily occupied by Russia and/or who have been deported to Russia, must be immediately allowed to return safely in Ukraine.
7. We fully support the work of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry. Victims have a right to justice and reparation. All commanders, perpetrators and accomplices of war crimes and other violations of international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, must be held accountable. We welcome the opening of an investigation by the ICC Prosecutor into the situation in Ukraine after the referrals by ICC State Parties, including all EU Member States. The OSCE Moscow Mechanism reports contribute to documenting the crimes and feed into accountability mechanisms that have, or may have in the future, jurisdiction.
8. The EU remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the temporarily occupied

territories of Ukraine. We call on Russia to comply with its obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law and to cease repressing the local population immediately. We encourage the OHCHR to continue its important work in addressing the human rights violations in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula.

9. Russia's external aggression against Ukraine is mirrored by a systematic and ever-increasing internal repression against its own population, especially targeting individuals opposing Russia's war of aggression. The EU continues to strongly condemn the severe expansion of restrictive legislation and systematic repression against civil society activists and human rights defenders, as well as the unabated crackdown on independent media, journalists and media actors, political opposition members, anti-corruption activists, and other critical voices. We express our full support for the OHCHR's efforts in documenting these human rights violations in Russia.
10. The EU is deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, which has been substantiated in harrowing detail in the latest OSCE Moscow Mechanism report, as well as by the findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus. We strongly condemn the ongoing repression and intimidation campaign, as well as the sham trials in absentia against all segments of civil society, including human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists, and persons belonging to the Polish and Lithuanian minorities. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to comply with their international human rights obligations and to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, especially those experiencing serious health conditions. The EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to stop enabling Russia's war of aggression.
11. In conclusion, we reaffirm the importance of the EU-OHCHR Strategic Dialogue on Human Rights within the framework of the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights and the EU Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism. We

reaffirm our firm support for the independent and impartial mandate of the OHCHR and we wish you, Mr. High Commissioner, every success in the exercise of your mandate.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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