

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1149  
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**EU statement on the criminal charges brought against  
Russian human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko**

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The European Union expresses our deep concern over the criminal charges that have been brought against Valentina Cherevatenko, founder and President of the “Women of the Don” organisation, under the so-called Foreign Agents law in Russia. We made clear in our statements to the Permanent Council on 2 June 2016 and 7 July 2016, that a criminal investigation into Ms Cherevatenko would mark a dangerous precedent for the criminalisation of peaceful and human rights activity in the country.

It is therefore with deep dismay that we have to raise this case for a third time in this room. The “Women of the Don” is an internationally respected organisation that works on issues of violence against women, gender discrimination and peace building initiatives in conflict zones, particularly the North Caucasus and the east of Ukraine.

In the Helsinki Final Act, the right of individuals to know and act upon their human rights were set out. In Copenhagen in 1990, OSCE participating States committed themselves to ensure that individuals are permitted to exercise the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organisations which seek the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore repeat our position that the practice of declaring NGOs to be “foreign agents”, contradicts OSCE commitments, cripples civil society and unduly restricts the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

We call again on the Russian authorities to align policies and legislation with the human rights obligations and commitments that Russia has undertaken and to stop stigmatising civil society organisations by branding them as “foreign agents”.

The EU and its Member States will continue to take a close interest in the case brought against Valentina Cherevatenko. We call on Russia to drop the charges against Valentina Cherevatenko.

People in Russia must be allowed to exercise their freedom of association effectively and non-governmental organisations must be able to operate in an environment conducive to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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 country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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