



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1337 Vienna, 30 September 2021

EU Statement on the Current Issue raised by the US on Civil Society

1. The unique role of civil society organisations and human rights defenders in the OSCE goes all the way back to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Civil society's crucial role in implementation of OSCE commitments has been recognized i.a. in the Astana Commemorative Declaration, where the participating States stressed "*the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law*".
2. The EU welcomes the involvement of civil society in the work of the OSCE during the Swedish Chairpersonship and the dedicated focus on civil society this month. The EU, including through its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, is committed to supporting and defending the important role of civil society in upholding human rights and democratic governance. We also commend the co-operation between civil society organisations and the OSCE, in particular ODIHR, the HCNM and the RFOM, as well as the field missions, as an essential contribution to promoting human rights and comprehensive security.
3. Since its establishment thirty years ago, ODIHR has assumed a leading role in the OSCE region in supporting participating States to strengthen democratic institutions and respect for human rights, the rule of law as well as creating a platform for civil society and human rights defenders to interact with national authorities, ensuring their voice is heard. We look forward to the conference marking ODIHR's anniversary on 14-15 October in Warsaw. It will be an occasion to reflect on achievements of the last three decades, and – together with the civil society representatives – to consider

current challenges and opportunities, and to discuss the Office's role in continuing to promote democracy and human rights in the future.

4. Civil society organizations embody a demand for transparent and accountable governance, and seek to ensure that there are limits on state power. Civil society participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective policy.
5. The battle for the respect of human rights is still a high-risk activity in many parts of the OSCE region, as civil society actors are often the target of intimidation, attacks, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances or torture because of their work. These risks increase in situations of conflict, in countries where the judicial power does not enjoy independence and in situations where law enforcement personnel lack sufficient training.
6. The EU will continue to call on all participating States to live up to their international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments, as well to speak up against the shrinking space, intimidation and reprisals against civil society and human rights defenders.

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

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