

Joint statement

on “The Death of Alexei Navalny and the Dire Human Rights Situation in Russia”

1463rd meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

29 February 2024

Madam Chairperson,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following 39 participating States, inter alia those that on 28 July 2022 invoked the Moscow (Human Dimension) Mechanism on the Threats to the Fulfilment of the Provisions of the Human Dimension Posed by Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Russian Federation: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country Lithuania.

The report under the Moscow Mechanism clearly showed the Russian Federation’s complete disregard for its OSCE commitments in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The report determined that “a decade of reform legislation in Russia has completely changed the scope of action of Russian civil society, cutting it off from foreign and international partners, suppressing independent initiatives, stifling critical attitudes towards the authorities, silencing the media and suppressing political opposition”.

Such internal clampdowns on human rights and fundamental freedoms helped the Russian Federation prepare the ground for its war of aggression against Ukraine.

Over the last two years, Russian authorities have further tightened internal repressions in an apparent attempt to silence all opposing voices.

The sudden tragic death of the prominent opposition politician Alexei Navalny in a Russian penal colony, following years of detention in poor conditions which, according to UN experts, amounted to torture and ill-treatment, as well as unjust detentions and the use of excessive force against people peacefully mourning his death, heralds a grim level of state repression. In this context, we call on Russia to immediately release those unjustly detained and to promptly launch a full, independent, and transparent investigation into the circumstances surrounding Alexei Navalny's death in custody. We were relieved that Mr Navalny's body has finally been released to his family; we call on Russia to respect their wishes.

In accordance with international law, States should take all necessary measures to protect the lives and health of individuals deprived of their liberty. However, according to numerous testimonies the situation of political prisoners in Russia is dire. While in detention they face the persistent use of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence, and threats of sexual abuse by law enforcement officers. Many, as in the case of Alexei Navalny, are imprisoned in conditions that could amount to torture and ill-treatment, including prolonged detention in punitive isolation cells in cold and damp conditions, deprived of access to adequate medical care leading to the deterioration of their health. Political prisoners are also removed from public view, cut off from access to their lawyers, as well as denied contacts with family and loved ones.

We are particularly concerned about the Russian opposition politician and long-time champion of OSCE principles Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is serving a 25-year sentence for simply speaking truth to power by criticizing the Kremlin's war against Ukraine. Despite having a serious medical condition resulting from two poisoning attempts, since September 2023 he has been kept in punitive solitary

confinement in a Siberian prison. We continue to stand with Evgenia Kara-Murza and support her efforts to raise Vladimir's case.

We reiterate our call to the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Vladimir Kara-Murza and all political opposition activists, human rights defenders, journalists and other media actors, including: Oleg Orlov, leader of the Nobel Prize winning human rights organization Memorial sentenced on February 27 to 2.5 years in prison for allegedly “discrediting” the Russian army, former Moscow lawmaker Alexey Gorinov, sentenced to seven years for a number of anti-war statements; Maria Ponomarenko, sentenced to six years for disseminating so-called “fake news” about the Russian army; Alexei Vladimirovich Moskalov, sentenced to two years on the charge of „actions aimed at discrediting the armed forces“ after his daughter drew an anti-war painting in school; Dmitry (Dima) Aleksandrovich Ivanov, sentenced to eight years and six months on the charge of spreading false information about the deployment of the Russian armed forces; as well as Ilya Yashin, Olga Smirnova, Alexandra Skochilenko, Boris Kagarlitsky, Yuri Dmitriev, Igor Baryshnikov, Lilia Chanyшева, Ksenia Fadeeva, Ivan Safronov and many others.

We also condemn in the strongest possible terms the denial of the human rights of LGBTI persons and the fact that any action perceived as supporting individuals belonging to these groups is criminalized by the authorities in Russia.

We will keep reminding the Russian Federation of its international obligations and commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including OSCE principles and commitments which it willingly signed up to.

We reiterate our call on the OSCE to continue giving priority attention to the most critical issues in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia that continue to seriously undermine democratic stability, peace, and security throughout the OSCE region and could have even greater unpredictable consequences at national and international levels.

We express our deep admiration and our strong support to the members of Russian civil society who despite extremely difficult conditions and the permanent threat of attack and arrest, continue to work for a free and democratic Russia, respectful of human rights, the rule of law, and committed to peace and our collective security.

Russia must stop its relentless attacks and repressions against dissidents, independent journalists, and ordinary citizens exercising their freedom of expression. Policies aimed at suppressing civil society will have devastating long-term consequences. There is no future in violence. There is no future in repression.

I thank you.