



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1438 Vienna, 7 September 2023

#### **EU Statement on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances**

1. On 30 August, we marked the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to the prevention and eradication of involuntary or enforced disappearances, as well as to combatting impunity for those responsible for, or complicit in, such crimes.
2. Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine has starkly reminded us of the brutality and devastating impact of this practice. Not only on the victims and survivors, but also on their families, communities and societies as a whole.
3. In a letter to the Russian authorities, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture recently referred to the widespread allegations of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including enforced disappearances of Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war by Russian troops in Ukraine as amounting to a pattern of violations that could indicate State endorsement. If proven, the special rapporteur warned that this would constitute a crime against humanity.
4. The OSCE Moscow Mechanism reports have documented individual cases of Russian troops' abducting, detaining and unlawfully arresting civilians, including children, while refusing to provide any information about their fate or location. We strongly condemn these practices, including in the so-called 'filtration camps', and the enforced disappearances and persecution of Crimean Tatars in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula as grave violations of international law, including international

human rights law and international humanitarian law, and stand firm in demanding that those responsible be held to account.

5. Our OSCE and international commitments and obligations are clear: any forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are unequivocally prohibited, under all circumstances, without exceptions. With the adoption of the 2020 Ministerial Council Decision on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the participating States recognised enforced disappearances as a serious human rights violation in the OSCE area.
6. Regrettably, we continue to receive new alarming reports of enforced disappearances from several parts of the OSCE region. While Russia's brutal and illegal actions in Ukraine constitute the most recent grave example, many other cases remain unresolved, denying an effective remedy and assistance to the victims and survivors.
7. In this regard, the EU remains seriously concerned about the fate of people subjected to enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan. We reiterate our strong call on Turkmenistan to immediately acknowledge this scourge, take action on the outstanding cases and eradicate the problem of enforced disappearances. The EU also reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities for a complete and transparent investigation into all alleged violations and abuses of human rights, including the reports of enforced disappearances in the aftermath of the 2020 fraudulent presidential elections. Furthermore, recent reports indicating an increase in the practice of "incommunicado detentions" of political prisoners in 2023 are deeply concerning. All individuals, including civil society and opposition actors, must be protected from such criminal acts.
8. We have to ensure that all persons in vulnerable situations are protected against enforced disappearances. The lack of effective protection of economic, social and cultural rights is a contributing factor to enforced disappearances. According to the UN Committee and Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, people living in poverty are more vulnerable and exposed to higher risk of enforced disappearances.

9. In light of persisting challenges, we encourage all participating States to strongly consider ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to cooperate fully with the UN Committee and the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and to take concrete measures to prevent enforced disappearances. This includes investigating effectively all allegations of enforced disappearances, bringing perpetrators to justice and providing redress to the victims and their families.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, as well as MONACO align themselves with this statement.

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