



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1333
Vienna, 2 September 2021**

**EU Statement marking the International Day of the Victims
Of Enforced Disappearances**

FINAL (596 words)

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. Enforced disappearances are a serious violation of human rights which guarantee, inter alia, the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Our OSCE and international commitments are abundantly clear: Any forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are unequivocally prohibited, under all circumstances, without exceptions.
3. We are satisfied that with the adoption of the Ministerial Council Decision on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment last year, the OSCE has for the first time recognised enforced disappearances as a serious human rights violation in the OSCE area.
4. We have to make sure that all persons belonging to vulnerable groups are protected against enforced disappearances. The lack of effective protection of economic, social and cultural rights is 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.
5. We are deeply concerned that – despite our clear commitments – we continue to receive new, alarming reports of enforced disappearances from several parts of the OSCE region, often in the context or under the pretext of the fight against organised

crime and terrorism. The fear generated by this practice is not only limited to the victims, but also affects their families, communities and society as a whole.

6. At the same time, many older cases remain unresolved, denying justice and effective remedy and assistance to the victims. Unfortunately, the inefficiency in the search for missing persons often is a result of a lack of political will and cooperation, especially unwillingness to share key information. Moreover, a culture of impunity and a lack of safeguards in the criminal justice system impede the eradication of these crimes.
7. We remain alarmed by the reports, including the latest report of the UN Special Rapporteur, on the situation of human rights in Belarus, of enforced disappearances in Belarus in the aftermaths of the presidential elections last year, where, inter alia, peaceful protesters and bystanders went missing for days.
8. The EU calls on Belarus to immediately stop the practice of enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment. All individuals, including civil society and opposition actors, must be protected from such criminal acts. The EU calls for a complete and transparent investigation into all alleged violations and abuses of human rights.
9. We also remain seriously concerned about the fate of people subjected to enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan. Reports have documented more than 120 cases of people kept in total isolation in Turkmenistan's prisons. We continue to follow the situation of the disappeared persons, and are concerned about reports that a number of them have served their sentences, but have not yet been released.
10. The EU reiterates its strong call on Turkmenistan to immediately acknowledge this scourge, take action on the outstanding cases and eradicate the problem of enforced disappearances.
11. In light of persistent challenges, we encourage all OSCE 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 prevent enforced disappearances. This includes investigating effectively all allegations of enforced disappearances, bringing perpetrators to justice and providing proper redress to the victims and their families.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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