

The Russian text is attached below

**Speech of Oleksandra Romantsova (Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine)
addressed to representatives of the OSCE participating countries**

Session 11: Fundamental Freedoms I, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, NHRI, the role of civil society in the protection of HR and freedom of movement

Topic: Joint statement to stop of shrinking space for civil society at OSCE region

Dear Chairman, representatives of the OSCE participating countries and colleagues,

I want to present the position of the OSCE-wide NGO-network 'Civic Solidarity Platform', on the issue of the problem of shrinking space for civil society, which has numerous negative implications for realisation of the OSCE comprehensive security concept.

The civil society has been a strong driving force across the OSCE region and has played a vital role in collecting and disseminating information from the ground. The Helsinki Final Act confirms that organisations and persons have a relevant and positive role to play in contributing to the achievement of the aims of their co-operation and the right of the individual to know and act upon his rights and duties.

That's why it's so dangerous that the backlash against civil society has accelerated lately in many OSCE participating States. Increasing restrictions on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, as well as growing threats to the security of civil society activists, their freedom of movement and the right to fair trial have a hugely negative impact on the ability of civil society to operate freely and without the fear of reprisals.

Some participating States attempt to justify restrictions on the ability of civil society to operate freely by the false pretexts of protecting state sovereignty and preventing "foreign interference in domestic affairs", fight against terrorism and extremism and protection of "traditional values". Over the past years in several OSCE participating States to further toughen legislation regarding NGOs and intensify repressive practices, first and foremost in the context of the "foreign agents" and similar laws. The autocratic governments have moved from attacking individual human rights defenders to attacking the mechanisms of protection of human rights defenders and even to undermining the international system of human rights protection as such.

The civil society organisations and activists documenting human rights violations in conflict zones, involved in conflict prevention and peace-building, as well as those working to combat xenophobia and hate crime, advocating for equality and promoting the rights of discriminated groups (women, LGBTIQ, national minorities and migrants) are especially targeted and disproportionally affected.

That's why more than 80 NGO-s from all region of OSCE which are united by our platform of Civil Solidarity CALLS ON the authorities of OSCE participating States to reverse the backlash against civil society at the national level, inter alia, to:

- stop referring to civil society groups critical of government policies as political tools of foreign interference in domestic affairs,
- refrain from describing civil society groups critical of government policies as a threat to "traditional values" and stability,
- stop engaging in smear campaigns and making discrediting statements against civil society groups and activists;
- repeal "foreign agents" laws" and lift restrictions on international funding of civil society activities;
- promptly and effectively investigate all attacks against civil society activists and bring their perpetrators and masterminds to justice,
- stop conflating civic activism and extremism and imposing excessive and disproportionate restrictions of freedoms of association, assembly, and expression in the name of security, including countering terrorism,
- stop criminalising non-violent expression to suppress critical voices and prevent accountability of governments,
- recognise and support the role civil society plays in combating radicalisation and violent extremism by reaching out to include citizens and residents from minority groups,
- stop using the judicial system as a means of repression and pressure on civil society, including through unfair trials, politically motivated convictions, approval of surveillance and travel bans (denial of exit from the country),
- stop using economic mechanisms, including tax, financial, anti-money-laundering, and other regulations, to restrict civil society activities,
- stop using "collective punishment" to intimidate and repress civil society activists by targeting their relatives, and vice versa, support them in every possible way.