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**Michel Forst**, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

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**Michael Georg Link**, Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

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**Andriy Parubiy**, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine

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**Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum  
on the deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea**

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum expresses its deep concern with regard to the recent deterioration of the situation with the human rights in Crimea caused by the Russian occupation authorities. In particular, there are serious concerns over the prosecution and arrests of human rights defenders and attorneys protecting the rights of the citizens of Ukraine in the Crimean peninsula. Politically motivated cases fabricated by the Russian authorities are used as an instrument of political pressure on the citizens opposing the illegal actions of the Russian Federation in Crimea, in particular the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea.

For instance, on 26 January 2017 the attorney Emil Kurbedinov was arrested, having been groundlessly accused of extremism. On that day, Emil Kurbedinov was going to visit a Crimean Tatar activist, in whose house Russian law enforcement agencies were conducting a search. In addition, on 25 January the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation detained in Crimea the Russian attorney Nikolai Polozov and tried to interrogate him as a witness in the case of Ilmi Umerov, Deputy Head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (hereinafter - Mejlis), the legal proceedings against whom are still in

Secretariat of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Rue de l'Industrie 10, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel. +32 (0)2 893 2585; email: [info@eap-csf.eu](mailto:info@eap-csf.eu)

[www.eap-csf.eu](http://www.eap-csf.eu)

progress. It should be noted that Nikolai Polozov is acting as Ilmi Umerov's attorney in this criminal case. Both lawyers are defence attorneys in several notorious cases initiated against civic activists by the Russian authorities in the occupied Crimea. In particular, Emil Kurbedinov has been defending several people arrested in the "Hizb ut-Tahrir" criminal case, the "case of 26 February", as well as the cases against the Deputy Head of the Mejlis Ilmi Umerov and the journalist Mykola Semena. Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chyigoz are also among Mykola Polozov's clients.

On 5 February 2017, after 10 days of detention in the Simferopol pre-trial detention facility, Emil Kurbedinov was released. However, the persecution of lawyers, civic activists and Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea by the Russian Federation is a systematic phenomenon that requires a strong reaction and decisive steps from the international community.

The situation with human rights in Crimea has been worsening from the moment of its illegal occupation and annexation by the Russian Federation. The persecution of Crimean Tatars, indigenous people of Crimea, is continuous. The Mejlis, the highest executive representative body of Crimean Tatars, that Russian authorities defined as "an extremist organization" due to its opposition to illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea was banned by the Russian Federation. The persecution of independent media continues. Freedom of speech and assembly, right to liberty and security of person, right to respect for private and family life, right to a fair trial are violated. The Fourth Convention (1949) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War is breached. There are permanent restrictions on the access to the Crimean peninsula by attorneys and delegations of international organisations with an intention to obtain objective information on how human rights, including the rights of national minorities and indigenous people, are observed.

In particular, last week the Crimean Tatars who were arrested by Russian authorities and against whom the so-called investigation is still active, were included by the Russian Federation in the list of terrorists and extremists, thus additionally restricting their rights. Earlier the "suspects" were subjected to forced psychiatric examination. Ilmi Umerov, the member of the Mejlis who has been prosecuted for a long time due to his statements in media treated as "the threats to territorial integrity of the Russian Federation", has been repeatedly accused of extremism. The politically and religiously motivated persecution of Crimean Muslims continues despite the lack of evidence of any illegal acts committed by them. In particular, as a result of several legal trials, on 3 February the term of detention of eight Muslims was prolonged. They were arrested based on a mere suspicion that they might belong to the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir defined as "terrorist" in Russia but not prohibited in Ukraine.

After the grave violation of the international law by having occupied Crimea, the Russian Federation continues to demonstrate disrespect for international human rights and humanitarian law on the occupied territory (including the legal trials). The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on territorial integrity of Ukraine adopted on 27 March 2014 confirmed the recognition of the



territorial integrity of Ukraine “within its internationally recognized borders”. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 71/205 adopted on 19 December 2016 recognized Russia as the occupying Power, as well as its full responsibility for brutal violations of human rights on the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine – in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. In particular, the resolution called upon Russia as the occupying state to adhere to its obligations under international law and “to immediately release Ukrainian citizens who were unlawfully detained and judged without regard for elementary standards of justice”. It also urged the Russian Federation “to ensure the proper and unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring missions and human rights non-governmental organizations”.

Therefore, while the Russian occupation authorities bear full responsibility to implement the Fourth Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (12 August 1949) and the two Protocols Additional to it ratified by the Russian Federation, it does not uphold its obligations under applicable international law.

In light of the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Crimea, we call upon the EU institutions and other international partners to:

- adequately react to persecutions, repressions and other violations of human rights by the Russian Federation in the occupied Crimea;
- find appropriate mechanisms (in particular but not limited to sanctions), employ additional tools of influence on the Russian Federation in order to react to the current situation in an adequate manner.

***Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum***