

## EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



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Brussels, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Isaiah X. Smith  
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Dear Mr Smith,

Thank you for your message to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker and to the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HRVP) Mogherini of 28 December 2017 about the persecution of LGBTI persons in Chechnya and the serious human rights violations committed in Myanmar against the Rohingya. I have been asked to reply on their behalf.

The EU is aware of the violence and intimidation against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersexed (LGBTI) individuals in Chechnya and have made concerns known in a number of ways. On 6 April 2017, the spokesperson for the HRVP issued a statement calling for "prompt, effective and thorough investigations into the reports of abductions and killings of gay men in Chechnya". The HRVP also discussed these developments with Russian civil society representatives when she visited Moscow on 24 April 2017. She subsequently raised concerns with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov during their meeting on the same day.

The EU has also issued statements on this matter in the Permanent Council of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and in the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Since the reports of violence became public, EU officials, in and outside Russia, have liaised with local human rights defenders, international human rights organisations and the journalists who uncovered the persecution campaign in order to be fully and accurately informed on the situation on the ground and to offer support to the victims. EU Missions in Moscow discussed the issue and coordinated their action. Some Member States granted visas to the victims of the persecution.

The EU continues to urge the Russian authorities to conduct in-depth investigations of the alleged cases of arrests and killings. In this regard, the EU has noted the recent efforts of the Russian High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Moskalkova, to shed light on human rights violations in Chechnya. The EU has however not received information from the Russian authorities about the ongoing investigation by the Russian Investigative Committee.

Finally, I would like to inform you that, while the EU does not have measures related to human rights violations committed by Russian officials, the head of the Chechen Republic, Mr Ramzan Kadyrov, is on the EU's sanctions list for his actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity. This means that his assets in the EU are frozen and he cannot enter the territory of the EU.

As regards the Rohingya crisis, the EU set out its position clearly in Council conclusions of 16 October 2017 and 26 February 2018, condemning grave human rights violations committed by Myanmar military and security forces that resulted in an unprecedented exodus of almost 700,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017. In the light of the disproportionate use of force and widespread and systematic grave human rights violations committed by the military and security forces and the continuous climate of impunity, fear and insecurity in Rakhine State, the latest Council conclusions invited the High Representative to present options for a strengthening of the existing embargo on arms and equipment which can be used for internal repression. Moreover, the High Representative has been invited to make proposals for targeted restrictive measures against senior military officers of the Myanmar armed forces responsible for serious and systematic human rights violations. Preparatory work has started on these two subjects in cooperation with Member States.

These Council conclusions also state that the EU and its Member States intend to reduce their practical defence cooperation to the strict minimum with the sole purpose of strengthening democratic principles, the respect of human rights and the rule of law. Moreover, the Commission is invited to monitor the respect of human rights that are the basis for the granting of trade preference to Myanmar under the "Everything But Arms" scheme.

More generally, the High Representative/Vice President follows closely the developments in Myanmar with respect to human rights and fundamental freedom, including in the area of freedom of expression and the specific case of the arrested Reuters journalists cited in your letter. The situation in Rakhine State and all other relevant human rights issues including the cases you mentioned were equally discussed at the recent 4<sup>th</sup> EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue (Nay Pyi Taw, 5 March 2018).

Yours sincerely,



Fernando Andresen Guimaraes

Head of Division