

Continued suppression of protests in the Russian Federation and the sentencing of Alexey Navalny: UK statement

Mr Chair,

The UK calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Alexey Navalny and all peaceful protesters and journalists arrested during the last two weeks by the Russian authorities.

The UK is worried by Mr Navalny's sentencing. The perverse ruling of 2 February targets the victim of a poisoning with a banned chemical weapon rather than those responsible, and shows Russia's failure to meet the most basic commitments expected of any responsible member of the international community. It also raises concern over the independence of the judiciary and wider rule of law in Russia. It is deplorable that Mr Navalny is being detained in relation to court decisions which the European Court of Human Rights determined to be arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable.

Furthermore, the UK is disappointed by the Russian MFA spokesperson's claim that the presence of foreign diplomats at the court was evidence of interference. This unfounded claim is particularly disappointing given the commitment of all OSCE participating States to accept each other's representatives as court observers as a confidence building measure, adopted in the OSCE Copenhagen Document.

Mr Chair,

As stated at last week's Permanent Council, a free and independent media is a cornerstone of any democratic society. We are appalled by the Russian authorities' use of violence and arbitrary arrest of peaceful protesters and journalists. This continued violent suppression of individual expression is unacceptable. These events confirm a continuous negative pattern of shrinking space for the opposition, civil society, human rights defenders and independent voices in Russia. Russia must respect its citizens' right to freedom of expression, adhere to its national and international obligations and release those detained arbitrarily for exercising their right of peaceful assembly.

Once more, we call on Russia to demonstrate its commitment to its international obligations, including its commitments in the OSCE, to release all those detained during peaceful demonstrations, and to release Mr Navalny without delay.