**Marietje Schaake (ALDE).** – Madam President, despite a Russian signature on human rights agreements, in practice violations are rampant and the perpetrators often go unpunished. Such violations may well be condoned or sanctioned from very high up. The arrest of Oyub Titiev of Memorial, which is, indeed, a well-respected Sakharov Prize winner and the last independent NGO operating in Chechnya, is a case in point.

New laws throughout Russia target NGOs and restrict free speech and freedom of assembly. On top of that, the targeted abuse of the rights of LGBTI people is of particular concern for our Group. We call for Titiev’s unconditional release, as well as the release of all political prisoners. Russia needs to reverse its course towards its people, their NGOs and their opposition representatives.

For the EU, too, it is important to take responsibility, to follow the money and, at least, to shelter those who need our protection most.