



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1021 Vienna, 30 October 2014

EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Director of ODIHR, Mr Michael Georg Link

The European Union and its Member States welcome Director Link back to the Permanent Council. We congratulate Director Link and his staff for the organization of this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), and we thank him for this report.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, and is a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States. Whilst the OSCE Human Dimension commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever, we observe with deep concern that the gap in their implementation is widening rather than closing. We reiterate our concern about growing pressure on civil society, journalists and human rights defenders, undue restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and political interference with the justice system in parts of the OSCE area.

HDIM is a unique peer review mechanism enabling participating States to hold each other to account and for participating States to be held to account by independent civil society. We note that this year's HDIM saw the participation of a record number of NGOs and the holding of a record number of side events. We express our deep thanks to the representatives of independent civil society for their sometimes bold and brave testimonies which have highlighted the challenges, and in some cases serious shortcomings in the implementation of OSCE commitments in their respective states. We attach great importance to the existence of an independent and vibrant civil society as well as its participation in OSCE events. We value the views of civil society and our partners in the OSCE, and have listened carefully to the concerns and recommendations directed to us.

At the same time, we were deeply concerned to hear the message of many; one of harassment and attacks on human rights defenders and journalists and of mounting pressures on and shrinking space for civil society. We judge it important that OSCE participating States respond to these disturbing trends including by reaffirming and strengthening our common commitments to the enjoyment of the fundamental freedoms of expression, and of association and peaceful assembly at the Basel Ministerial Council. We also cannot disregard an apparent tendency, on the part of some delegations, to instrumentalise NGOs. We believe this does not contribute to building trust and confidence or creating common ground among participating States.

We are disappointed that Turkmenistan once again did not participate in the meeting thus missing an opportunity to engage in a frank and genuine dialogue with other participating States and civil society activists that raised concerns about the implementation of their commitments in their country.

We are troubled by reports of alleged threats against HDIM NGO participants following interventions made at the HDIM this year and regard this as totally unacceptable. We call on participating States to refrain from such intimidations, in accordance with the commitments they have subscribed to. We will continue to monitor the situation carefully.

The crisis in Ukraine, particularly the human rights violations in eastern Ukraine and in Crimea, which followed the emergence of various pro-Russian groups in these regions, was rightly particularly in focus at the meeting. We reiterate our condemnation of the aggression of Russian armed forces on Ukrainian soil and of the human rights violations which have taken place. In the face of such serious violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights, the independent, impartial and professional work of the OSCE's institutions is as important as ever. We commend the engagement of ODIHR in Ukraine, including the two recent election observation missions successfully conducted this year, as well as the publication of a human rights assessment report together with the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We encourage the Government of Ukraine to invite ODIHR to observe the local elections on 7 December in those parts of eastern Ukraine subject to the Special Status law.

Mr Chairperson,

The European Union agrees with Director Link that participating States should take further steps to strengthen the HDIM. We would be interested to hear any further views he has in this regard. We welcome that this year, for the first time, HDIM was live-streamed on the internet and welcome plans to do so in the coming years. HDIM should be as open and accessible as possible. We also support moving the holding of HDIM from September to May. We also believe that follow-up to the meeting should be improved to ensure that HDIM discussions better inform preparations for Ministerial Councils and the work programmes of subsequent Chairmanships.

The European Union wishes to reiterate the utmost importance that we attach to this dimension of the OSCE's work and underline our full support for the work of ODIHR in protecting and promoting human rights across our region. We once again reiterate our full support for the autonomy and mandate of ODIHR. This is also reflected in our support for ODIHR's budget proposal for 2015. It is important that participating States draw on the expertise that is available from ODIHR and respond to the recommendations made.

We thank Director Link and his staff for their work and highly commend them for the professional and transparent manner in which ODIHR fulfils its mandate.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.