



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 21 September – 2 October 2015

EU Statement – Opening Session

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the European Union at the opening session of the 2015 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

First of all, the EU would like to express its appreciation to the Serbian Chairmanship-in-Office for its able leadership of the OSCE this year. Our gratitude goes also to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the excellent preparation of this meeting as well as its continued efforts to promote human rights and democratic values in the OSCE area.

Mr Chairman,

40 years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, its basic principles continue to be valid and relevant. The OSCE, with its three-pillar approach, rightly considers human rights as an essential factor in the promotion of peace, security and prosperity as lasting security cannot be achieved without respect for human rights, the rule of law and functioning democratic institutions.

We too recognize the OSCE comprehensive concept of security and the close interlinkage between security and human rights. The EU therefore appreciates and fully supports the OSCE work in Human Rights and election observation. The EU is committed to implementing OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Missions recommendations as we are convinced that their implementation contributes to strengthening democratic institutions and to further improving electoral processes.



EUROPEAN UNION

Mr Chairman,

Despite the good work of the OSCE, we face a worrying trend of fundamental rights and freedoms being challenged in parts of our region. Conscious of this trend, we in the EU have adopted in July a new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy which puts special emphasis on ownership by, and co-operation with, local actors, institutions and mechanisms, including national human rights institutions, as well as civil society.

Allow me now to refer to specific country situations:

We remain deeply concerned by the serious human rights violations and abuses which continue in separatist controlled areas of eastern Ukraine and the further deterioration of the human rights situation in the illegally annexed Crimea. The EU reiterates its serious concern about the precarious position of persons belonging to national minorities, in particular Crimean Tatars, after the illegal annexation of Crimea. The EU urges all sides of the conflict to ensure respect for international human rights and humanitarian law and calls for unimpeded access of the OSCE and other international organisations to all of Ukraine, especially the Crimea Peninsula and the Donbas. We fully support the work of the OSCE, particularly through the Special Monitoring Mission and its facilitating role in the follow-up of the Minsk Agreements, which is key to a sustainable political solution in line with the OSCE principles and commitments, and in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. We call on Russia to cease the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and to use its influence over the separatists to meet their Minsk commitments in full.

The EU remains concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Russia and the curtailing of fundamental rights and freedoms, especially the freedoms of



EUROPEAN UNION

expression and association, the repressions against the political opposition and the harassment of independent media. In short, the human rights situation in the country falls short of Russia's OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations. Furthermore, the abduction of Estonian police officer E. Kohver by the Russian Security Services on Estonian territory, his subsequent illegal detention and conviction constitute a clear violation of international law. The EU calls for his immediate release.

The criminal cases brought against O. Sentsov, A. Kolchenko, N. Savchenko and other persons illegally abducted from Ukraine and detained in Russia constitute a breach of international law and elementary standards of justice. We call on Russia to respect its international commitments and release without further delay all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

The EU is encouraged by the release of the political prisoners in Belarus on 22 August, which we believe represents important progress in the efforts towards the improvement of relations between the EU and Belarus. The EU calls upon the government of Belarus to take the next steps and carry out a comprehensive review of relevant legislation, policies and practices to ensure its full compliance with international human rights obligations, responsibilities and commitments. The EU remains ready to assist Belarus in this regard, an offer we have reiterated during the dialogue we had with Belarus in Brussels on 28 July. We see the Presidential elections in October as an opportunity for Belarus to implement recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR and to live up to the expectations of the international community by offering a level playing field for all candidates. The EU welcomes that OSCE/ODHIR could establish a substantial Election Observation Mission.

We also call on Azerbaijan to abide by its international obligations to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and implement reforms to guarantee the rule of law, an independent judiciary and access to fair trials for all. We regret the government's



EUROPEAN UNION

decision to close the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Baku. The EU strongly believes that an OSCE field presence is one of the most effective ways for the OSCE to provide support in achieving necessary reforms and promoting the modernization of the country, including in the area of democracy and fundamental freedoms. The upcoming Parliamentary elections on 1 November are an opportunity for Azerbaijan to implement the recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR. We deeply regret that Azerbaijan placed restrictions on ODIHR's planned election observation for the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. We share the view expressed by ODIHR that the insistence on a restricted number of observers is directly counter to OSCE commitments and in contradiction to ODIHR's election observation mandate. This insistence has compelled ODIHR to cancel its election observation mission. We call on Azerbaijan to engage in discussions with ODIHR on how ODIHR can provide assistance to Azerbaijan in the implementation of its election-related and other OSCE commitments.

The EU continues to be concerned about Uzbekistan's implementation of its OSCE human dimension commitments, notably those related to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, including safety of journalists and human rights defenders, and freedom of assembly and association. The EU underlines that the fundamental rights of all citizens must be upheld without reservation. We support Uzbekistan's efforts towards labour reforms and we encourage Uzbekistan to move resolutely forward with the implementation of the human rights commitments in its recently adopted National Action Plan, working in close cooperation with UN bodies, and to fully implement OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on electoral processes.

We are also concerned by continued limitations on freedom of expression and freedom of association in Turkmenistan, as well as reports of torture and the use of incommunicado detention. We encourage Turkmenistan to implement reforms and urge the authorities to fully engage with UN treaty bodies to address these issues.



EUROPEAN UNION

We also observe negative developments in other participating States including in countries that are close partners of the EU. We continue to raise human rights concerns with those participating States through our bilateral human rights dialogues and the specific instruments of the EU accession process.

Mr Chairman,

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are at the heart of the EU external policy, and the adoption of a new far-reaching and ambitious EU Action Plan 2015-2019 on Human Rights and Democracy bears witness to this.

However, we are facing a number of challenges in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms also within the European Union. This is the case for example in the fight against discrimination and xenophobia and in the area of asylum and migration. The scenes that we have witnessed in recent days on our borders, and inside the EU, are unprecedented. We face a major challenge in managing the arrival of record numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, but we are determined to meet this challenge whilst fully respecting our international commitments, managing our borders in full respect of our values and upholding the human rights of migrants and refugees. We also remain firmly committed to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance both within the EU and throughout the world. The EU and its Member States constantly and consistently endeavour to ensure that the necessary legal framework and mechanisms are in place to meet these challenges.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A vigorous and independent civil society is essential in order to ensure protection and promotion of human rights and to enhance the accountability of governments.



EUROPEAN UNION

We therefore welcome and encourage the participation of Civil Society organisations from across the whole OSCE area in this and in other OSCE meetings. As further consideration is given as to how we can make this event more focused and operational, we must ensure that broad civil society participation remains central to the meeting.

We are particularly concerned at cases of reprisals by states against members of civil society participating at previous Human Dimension Implementation Meetings or at our multilateral fora. Supporting civil society space and human rights defenders remains a priority for the EU, and with this in mind we will host a side event tomorrow to discuss challenges facing human rights defenders in the OSCE region.

I look forward to constructive discussions during this and the other events in the next two weeks and hope to see the outcome of this Meeting serve as an important input for the Belgrade Ministerial Council later this year.

Thank you for your attention.

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, 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.