



HDIM.DEL/0029/13
23 September 2013

EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2013 Warsaw, 23 September 2013

EU statement – Opening session

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU would like to express its thanks and appreciation to the Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office for its leadership of the OSCE this year. Our gratitude goes also to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and its Director, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, for the excellent preparation of this meeting as well as their continued efforts to promote human rights and democratic values in the OSCE area by assisting participating States in implementing their commitments.

We would also like to particularly welcome the new High Commissioner, Ms Astrid Thors, who attends the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting for the first time. We are looking forward to her presentation about her priorities of work later today and would like to reiterate our full support for her important work.

The European Union remains committed to the implementation of the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights

and Democracy, adopted last year in June. We recall that human rights are placed at the centre of the EU's policies and relations with the third countries, and constitute important work in relevant international fora such as the OSCE. Effective protection and promotion of human rights and democracy remain at the heart of EU's external action. We remain convinced that there cannot be lasting security and stability without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chairman,

We see today a worrying trend of fundamental rights and freedoms increasingly being challenged in parts of our region. There are examples of legal amendments which limit the space for civil society activities and new legislations that risk reinforcing discrimination against minority groups and restrict their freedom of expression. Therefore, we would like to recall that all participating States reconfirmed at the Astana Summit that *the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.* This provides the basis for the systematic and thorough assessment of the implementation of human dimension commitments in the OSCE. The Human Dimension Implementation meeting is an important event in this context. It allows us to take stock of the implementation of these

commitments, exchange best practices, identify the existing gaps and make recommendations where necessary in order to enhance their implementation. We would like to reiterate the important role of civil society in this context, including in the context of the monitoring of the implementation of the OSCE commitments.

Strengthening the implementation of human dimension commitments, also based on a more systematic follow-up of the recommendations of the autonomous OSCE Institutions to the participating States, is a top priority for the European Union in the OSCE. We deplore signs of backwards movement on existing commitment which we all reaffirmed in Astana. We express grave concern about the setbacks in several participating States in the implementation of the existing human dimension commitments and values. We are convinced that compliance with human dimension commitments across the OSCE area could be significantly improved. HDIM recommendations, including their proper and systematic follow-up, are an important tool towards enhancing compliance.

While we consider that the OSCE acquis is a solid basis for democracy, rule of law and human rights, we would like to stress that our human dimension commitments - as well as other commitments in the OSCE - need strengthening to reflect the changing security environment. In the OSCE context, we will

continue to work on advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms, with particular attention to the freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists. We welcome discussions initiated by the Chairmanships on these issues notably during the Human Dimension Seminar on Media Freedom Legal Framework which took place in May in Warsaw. We remain convinced that rights and commitments related to freedom of expression offline also apply online. In this regard, we would like to underline the adoption by consensus last year of the UNHRC landmark resolution on the Safety of Journalists, and on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on Internet. We will continue to work in order to achieve progress in this area also in the OSCE framework. Our other top priorities in the OSCE include freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of religion, belief and conscience as well as human rights defenders, fair trials, free and fair elections, the abolition of death penalty and the fight against torture and other forms of inhuman or degrading treatment.

We thank the Chairmanship for having organised the High level Conference on Tolerance and Non-discrimination in May and Albania for having hosted it. The fight against all forms of discrimination and promotion of tolerance is an important priority for the European Union. We condemn all forms and manifestations of discrimination and intolerance, be it on ethnic, social, religious grounds or based on sexual orientation and

gender identity.

We would like to reiterate our full support for the ODIHR's mandate and methodology, as well as for those of other autonomous institutions. In this context, we commend in particular the ODIHR activities in the area of election observation, which help us all implement our election-related commitments, including through follow up to its recommendations. We are concerned about the increasing financial and resource constraints in which the ODIHR operates and call on participating States to address this issue.

The European Union believes that a vigorous and independent civil society is essential to ensuring protection and promotion of human rights and enhancing the accountability of governments. Therefore, we support enhancing dialogue with civil society, including in the OSCE framework. We appreciate the unique involvement of civil society in OSCE human dimension events as well as their recommendations. We highly value the work of the non-governmental organizations and human rights activists working on the ground, which provides important information in the context of the monitoring of the human dimension commitments. We deplore recent attempts in some countries to criminalize activities of human rights defenders and to use the law to pursue them rather than protect them.

As in previous years, the European Union will make specific comments and recommendations in the working sessions of the Meeting, notably regarding the review of implementation of commitments relating to fundamental freedoms, as the basic tenets of genuinely democratic societies and providing recommendations. We look forward to constructive discussions during the next two weeks and hope to see the outcome of this Meeting serve as an important input in the context of preparations for the Kyiv Ministerial Council later this year.

The Candidate Countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as, the Republic of Moldova, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

** the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.