



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation N°845 Vienna, 15 February 2017

EU Statement on the role of military chaplains and the freedom of belief in the Armed Forces

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome the speakers, to the Forum for Security Co-operation and thank them for their stimulating presentations. We commend the Romanian FSC Chair for putting the interesting topic on the role of military chaplains and the freedom of belief in the armed forces on the FSC agenda. The discussion reminds us of the enduring value of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. There can be no lasting security and stability without respect for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The EU is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. We are committed to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, which concerns the right of a person to adopt, to change, or to abandon one's religion or belief, including the right to live without religious conviction or activity. The EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted specific Guidelines in 2013. We stress that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world. The EU works to ensure observance of the universal nature of this freedom.

We acknowledge the role of military chaplains in the Armed Forces and the benefits of the possibility of access to religious care and services for military personnel in the Armed Forces. We also underline the fact that spiritual care including guidance and sound counselling could be particularly important in the Armed Forces since this is focused on helping soldiers to cope with difficult situations.

We believe a collaborative approach centred on dialogue and partnership is the most effective means for the OSCE to address the challenges to freedom of religion or belief facing our region. Dialogue across national, regional or religious borders is essential to promote mutual respect and understanding. Dialogue is needed between

state authorities and representatives of religious groups, as well as between different groups in society. Moreover, we believe that the OSCE, and participating States in particular, should make full use of the expertise that has been developed within the Organisation.

We remain strong supporters of the OSCE Code of Conduct and attach great importance to the full implementation of its norms and principles, including those related to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Democratic control of armed and security forces, protection of human rights of armed forces personnel and adhering to the norms of International Humanitarian Law are key elements creating a framework in which armed forces operate. We will continue to support the efforts of the FSC Chair, the Secretariat and the FSC Co-ordinator on the Code of Conduct to address issues related to improving deficiencies in implementing and reporting on the Code of Conduct as well as outreach activities in promoting the principles and norms stipulated in the Code of Conduct also outside the OSCE area.

Finally, we thank once again the speakers as well as the FSC Chairmanship for providing us with the opportunity to exchange views on this interesting topic.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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