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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 22 September - 3 October 2014**

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#### **EU Opening Statement**

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Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the European Union at the opening session of the 2014 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

First of all, the EU would like to express its thanks and appreciation to the Swiss Chairmanship-in-Office for its able leadership of the OSCE this year. Our gratitude for the excellent preparation of this meeting, despite the particular difficult context in which the agenda was adopted this year, goes also to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and its newly appointed Director, Dr. Michael Georg Link, to whom we wish a lot of success in his new position. We look forward to working closely with Dr. Link and wish to pay tribute to the work of his predecessor, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, who served ODIHR with distinction.

Chairman,

This year's OSCE meetings are overshadowed by the crisis in and around Ukraine.

The European Union remains very much concerned about the crisis and its impact on the human rights situation in Ukraine, including Crimea, as evidenced by the UN as well as by ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities in their Human Rights Assessment Mission Report. We remain particularly concerned about the reported targeting and killing of civilians, abductions, torture, ill-treatment and other serious human rights abuses and violations of international law. We note from these reports that the human rights violations did not precede but rather accompanied and followed the emergence of various armed pro-Russian separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and



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Crimea. We also note that it is the activities of these groups that are the root cause of the serious human suffering experienced by the civilian population.

The EU continues to strongly condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and reiterates the urgent need for a sustainable political solution based on respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence. To this end, the EU is closely cooperating with several stakeholders, including the OSCE. The EU has condemned the aggression by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian soil and called upon the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw all its military assets and forces from Ukraine. The EU welcomes the signing of the Minsk Protocol on 5 September and the Memorandum of 19 September. The EU believes that effective and comprehensive monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine border should be an integral part of any solution.

Let me say that the OSCE has provided an exemplary response to this crisis, including through the ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities Human Rights Assessment Mission, that, among others, covered an important aspect of human rights violations in Crimea, through the Representative on Freedom of the Media continuous observation of and reporting on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists, and through the rapid deployment of the Special Monitoring Mission. The EU, together with its Member States strongly supports (also financially) the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and its independence, since we consider that independent monitoring is essential for defusing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security. We deeply regret the continuous obstacles impeding the activities of the OSCE and urge all parties to fully cooperate and support the OSCE missions.

The OSCE work to enhance the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms and towards a functional democracy in Ukraine has been outstanding also through the continuous engagement of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and through the work done by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The EU and its Member States have supported the OSCE Election Observation Mission to the Ukrainian



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presidential elections, including by financing and deploying OSCE observers and will extend the same support for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. We believe that, when and where appropriate, the OSCE can also play a valuable role in supporting the local dialogue processes.

Looking beyond this, the EU is particularly grateful for the work done by ODIHR in relation to election observation, which is based on a sound methodology and strong commitment to promote democracy. The EU deploys Election Observation Missions outside the OSCE area on the basis of a methodology very similar to the one employed by ODIHR and we regularly share experiences and ideas with ODIHR on how to improve independent and competent election observation in the framework of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation of 2005.

Chairman,

The OSCE, with its three-pillar approach, sees human rights as an essential factor in the promotion of peace and prosperity.

Similarly the EU is convinced that there cannot be lasting security and stability without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and has placed human rights at the heart of its foreign policy. The adoption, in June 2012 of an EU Strategic Framework and an Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy bears witness to this.

Both our organisations recognise the link between security and human rights and this is why the OSCE is for us a key partner in the promotion and protection of human rights.

The OSCE institutions, structures and field operations continue to provide valuable support, assistance and expertise to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU is committed to implementing in full all OSCE human dimension commitments.



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These commitments do not concern exclusively the internal affairs of a State, but are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States.

This is why we call on all participating States to abide by their commitments, to closely cooperate with the OSCE and make full use of the assistance offered.

This meeting is the main instrument we have to monitor effectively compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments, including through the identification of gaps, the exchange of best practices and recommendations, as well as their proper and systematic follow-up. This is extremely important and we should look at ways of making our work here even more focused and operational, in order to increase its impact on our policies.

Allow me now to outline what are currently our main priorities.

In the OSCE human dimension context, the EU concentrates on fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of both online and offline media, while defending and promoting the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights. The prevention of torture, abolition of the death penalty, fight against all forms of discrimination, including against LGBTI persons, protection of human rights defenders and engagement with civil society, including youth, are also important areas. Additionally, the EU promotes gender equality, women's political and economic empowerment and elimination of gender-based violence and sexual violence in conflict across the OSCE area.

Last year we voiced our concern at the way in which fundamental rights and freedoms were being increasingly challenged in some parts of the OSCE area. Unfortunately, this trend has persisted and indeed worsened, as confirmed by several international bodies and organisations, including the UN and the Council of Europe, with growing pressure on civil society, threats to journalists, bloggers and human right activists, restrictions on freedom of expression, and undue political interference with the justice system.



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Against this background, the EU welcomes ODIHR's engagement in the preparation of the OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, taking into account the serious situation of human rights defenders in the OSCE space. Ten years ago, we adopted the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, manifesting our conviction that if we truly want to promote a stable and peaceful world we cannot afford to see the voice of civil society silenced.

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

We therefore welcome and encourage the participation of Civil Society organisations from across the whole OSCE area in this and in other OSCE meetings, and appreciate the views and recommendations they provide on specific country situations and thematic issues.

Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to constructive discussions during the next two weeks and would like to use this opportunity to refer to two side events the EU is organising, one on freedom of expression and one on freedom of peaceful assembly. Both freedoms are part of our priorities, as witnessed by the fact that we adopted, in May this year, the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline. During these two events, we intend to discuss recent trends regarding the enjoyment of these freedoms in the OSCE space and identify ways of increasing our engagement with the active support of the OSCE and its bodies. The EU will also co-sponsor side-events on enforced disappearances and violence and hate crimes against LGBTI persons.

Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,



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Looking at our agenda and the other planned side events, I am convinced that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014 will demonstrate once again the significance of the human dimension as an essential foundation for the OSCE comprehensive engagement for security.

Thank you for your attention.

The Candidate Countries, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.