



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1160
Vienna, 12 October 2017**

**EU Statement in response to the Address by the Vice
President of the International Committee of the Red Cross
(ICRC) Ms Christine Beerli**

The European Union warmly welcomes Vice President Beerli of the ICRC to the Permanent Council. Madame Vice President, we thank you for your statement. We take this opportunity to pay tribute to the unique work carried out by the ICRC.

Recalling the 2009 EU Guidelines on International Humanitarian Law, we reiterate our commitment to promoting compliance with international humanitarian law. We reiterate our commitment to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and to preventing politicisation of humanitarian aid.

We highly value the ICRC as an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. We note the ICRC's message that international humanitarian actors are facing ever greater operational challenges and complexities, and we will continue to support you in your work.

The EU attaches great importance to the ICRC's humanitarian role. The current ICRC Donor Support Group (DSG) of 20 members, includes 11 EU Member States and the European Commission, represented by ECHO. The Commission has supported the life-saving work of the ICRC in some of the largest crises of the last decades, providing over 400 million Euros since 2008 – 166 million Euros in 2016 alone.

Within the OSCE region, the OSCE and ICRC have different responsibilities, but they complement each other. For example, the ICRC and the OSCE have been working closely on the issue of exchange of detainees in the Ukraine conflict. We call for the ICRC to receive full, safe and unimpeded access to all detainees and prisoners. We also use this opportunity to reiterate our deep concern about the human rights violations in areas of eastern Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Crimea. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights just published a report last month, which took up some elements of previous reports by the ICRC. These reports document systematic human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, and ill-treatment and torture in the illegally annexed Crimea.

The grave humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in and around Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol continues to affect millions of civilians. For hundreds of thousands of people living in towns and villages close to the contact line in eastern Ukraine, survival is a daily struggle. Due to difficult situations at crossing points, the ability of the Ukrainian population to move around is severely curtailed and they often have to endure a long wait exposed to heat, cold and the threat of shelling and landmines. The Stanytsia Luhanska bridge is a case in point and we commend you for your tireless efforts in this regard. Your efforts to restore vital infrastructure, to deliver humanitarian aid to those in need, as well as your work related to detainees and missing persons is crucial. However, the ICRC still faces severe restrictions, particularly in Russian-backed separatist-held areas, and continues to be denied access to the illegally annexed Crimea. Guaranteed safe and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Ukraine is vital.

The OSCE area remains scarred by protracted conflicts and by difficult post-conflict situations. Our efforts in the OSCE go towards resolution of protracted conflicts and improving the situation of those affected. We commend the work of the ICRC in protecting lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts worldwide. In the OSCE region, we appreciate your work helping to investigate cases of missing people in Georgia and your cooperation with the Personal Representative of the Chairmanship in Office to facilitate the retrieval of

bodies from the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, among many other projects. The ICRC's work on such issues as missing persons, visiting detention facilities, and local confidence building measures is a concrete and valuable contribution towards our shared goal of stability and peace. However, humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political solutions and we are determined to continue to push for political solutions of all these conflicts. We also commend the ICRC's valuable work in the Balkans and Central Asia. We would be interested to hear more of how the ICRC cooperates with OSCE field missions on the ground and your thoughts on how we could further improve cooperation.

Forced displacement on a large scale continues to be a challenge also in the OSCE area. The EU and its member states' work is beginning to yield clear results on the path towards a system for managing migration – jointly, sustainably, and in a manner respectful of human rights. Providing support and protection to people in need is a challenge that requires a global response and one in which the EU is actively engaged. In this regard, we value the work of ICRC directed towards responding to the needs of the most vulnerable ones, by keeping families together, reuniting them, clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing people and supporting their families, and ensuring proper and dignified handling of human remains and other forensic services.

In concluding, we reiterate our respect and support to the ICRC staff in Geneva and all over the world who carry out their duty often in the most dangerous circumstances. We wish you, Madame Vice President, every success in carrying out your important humanitarian mission.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA 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.