



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1044 Vienna, 12 March 2015

EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Director of ODIHR, Mr Michael Link

The European Union and its Member States welcome Director Link back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report.

In light of the immediate human rights, democracy and security challenges facing our region, the expert, professional and impartial role of ODIHR is as important as ever and we reiterate our full support for its excellent work. Many participating States have benefitted from ODIHR's advice on their path to democratic reform and their support in implementing commitments. Participating States must do their part to enable ODIHR to fulfill its mandate it has been entrusted with, including through provision of the necessary human and financial resources.

Responding to the crisis in and around Ukraine has rightly been high on the agenda of ODIHR. We commend ODIHR for its ongoing and intense engagement in Ukraine under challenging circumstances, including the Human Rights Assessment Mission Report and its two election observation missions last year. These activities are an important contribution to efforts to resolve this crisis. We welcome your readiness to deploy observers to specific areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to monitor local elections based on Ukrainian law and OSCE standards. We also commend ODIHR's readiness to conduct a "Human Rights Assessment Mission" to the illegally annexed Crimea. Comprehensive international monitoring of the human rights situation in Crimea is essential, given the deeply worrying reports we receive of developments following the Russian illegal annexation. Drawing on reports from civil society and IDPs can be a good first step in this regard. It is crucial that ODIHR enjoys full and unimpeded access and full cooperation by all sides. This also applies to ODIHR's proposal to monitor the trial of Nadia Savchenko, following the attendance of ODIHR representatives

at her court hearing on 25 February, and we urge the Russian Federation to enable a comprehensive monitoring.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. Security and stability are only possible when human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected, protected and strengthened. We attach the utmost importance to this dimension of the OSCE's work, and we are concerned about worrying negative trends in the implementation of our common commitments that have been taken on as obligations by all participating States.

ODIHR adds value in many areas and is rightly seen as an international standard setter in election observation. We take this opportunity to reiterate our strong support for the professionalism, independence and impartiality of ODIHR's election observation work. The scope of ODIHR's activities is extensive and its guidelines and advice are rooted in international standards. The Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders published last year, as well as the recent ODIHR/Venice Commission joint Guidelines on Freedom of Association, are valuable tools and we call on all participating States to make use of these to improve the implementation of OSCE commitments. We encourage ODIHR's ongoing work on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief and hope that activities will be enhanced with the recruitment of a Policy Adviser in this area. Much remains to be done to enhance the inclusion of Roma and Sinti as described by you, Director Link, this morning. We support ODIHR's strong engagement with civil society and call for their active participation in the wider work of the OSCE.

In conclusion, we would like to take this opportunity to express our full appreciation for the work performed by you, Ambassador Link, and your staff, and assure you of the EU's continued support.

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, 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.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.