



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 16 - 27 September 2019

EU statement - Opening Session

Madam Chair,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the European Union at this opening session of the 2019 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

The European Union would like to express its sincere appreciation for the leadership and tireless efforts of the Slovak Chairmanship to build consensus for the agenda of this edition of HDIM. We would also like to thank the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for its excellent preparation of this meeting.

Madam Chair,

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is the most important event in the OSCE Human Dimension. It distinguishes itself by its open character which allows for a genuine and frank dialogue amongst participating States as well as with members of civil society. This makes HDIM unique and we should all continue to honour this commitment. The founding documents of the OSCE recognize that human rights and fundamental freedoms within our societies are essential to our collective security.

We would like to express our strong support for the three autonomous institutions which play an important role in assisting the participating States to implement their OSCE commitments. Their invaluable work contributes to the tangible changes that are taking place on the ground.

In this interconnected and rapidly changing world, the EU is firmly committed to strengthen the rules-based international order grounded in human rights, democracy and the rule of law which are foundational values of the EU, and to fully support multilateralism.



EUROPEAN UNION

This commitment is illustrated by our active engagement in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. This meeting not only offers an opportunity to listen to independent voices and exchange information, but above all, it is an opportunity for all of us to be held to account regarding the clear OSCE commitments in the field of human dimension.

We cannot take human rights for granted. Many struggles for more liberty and freedom are still taking place across the world and in the OSCE area in particular. Human rights violations and abuses represent serious challenges to our comprehensive security.

Space for civil society to freely operate continues to shrink. The safety of many journalists is being undermined as part of a wider attack on freedom of expression, including through hate crime online. We are experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality. Cyber violence against women and girls is increasing. Torture and other ill-treatment are among the most abhorrent violations of human rights and human dignity.

We commend all individuals and organisations that work tirelessly to ensure that human rights are being respected. Support for human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is at the core of the EU's external human rights policy. The European Union will keep being at the side of those who stand up for human rights every day.

Allow me now to refer to specific country situations

We remain deeply concerned about the dire situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol since its illegal annexation by Russia. Residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly. Furthermore, we condemn the systematic persecution of the Crimean Tatar community. The precarious situation of persons belonging to national minorities on the peninsula is shameful.

The EU reiterates its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity within its international recognized borders. We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk Agreements in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We underline Russia's



EUROPEAN UNION

responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to exert influence over the armed formations it backs to meet those commitments in full.

We furthermore call on those in effective control to re-establish full access of all humanitarian organisations to the non-government controlled areas and to allow smooth and speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance. We welcome the commitment of Ukraine's new leadership to address the socio-economic and humanitarian consequences of the conflict in an inclusive manner and stand ready to engage with Ukraine to support this momentum.

The EU remains concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Russia, the curtailing of rights and freedoms, the repression against opposition and the shrinking space for independent media. We have noted with concern that the increasing restrictions on freedom of expression are mirrored by persistent Russian use of disinformation as a destabilising tool. The exercise of human rights in digital contexts appears to be increasingly under threat: a series of laws affecting freedom of speech on the internet in Russia have been adopted in recent times, with an acceleration in the last year. The EU also raised its concerns regarding violations of freedom of religion or belief, including the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. We are also concerned by instances of politically-driven persecutions of regular citizens who participate in peaceful protests, in order to intimidate them.

We have repeatedly expressed concerns about the arrests, attacks, intimidations and discrediting of human rights defenders and journalists working in the Chechen Republic. The release from detention of Oyub Titiev, Head of the Chechen branch of Memorial, in June 2019 contributes to redressing a serious injustice and is testimony to the work and determined solidarity of Russian and international civil society, activists, and legal experts, who worked tirelessly for this outcome. We continue to follow the case of Yuri Dmitriev and call for his immediate release. Our concerns about reports of arrests, unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture, and killings of people in Chechnya based on their actual or alleged sexual orientation remained unanswered. The human rights situation continues to fall below Russia's OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations.

We continue to be concerned about the human rights situation and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan. The presidential pardoning on Novruz holidays which included



EUROPEAN UNION

representatives of political parties, NGOs, bloggers and journalists, was a welcome step. We reiterate however our call to release journalist Afgan Mukhtarli and encourage Azerbaijan to review all remaining cases of incarceration resulting from the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to release all imprisoned political activists, human rights defenders and other civil society representatives and to fully restore their political rights, in line with international commitments. We continue to share RFoM's concerns regarding laws and regulation affecting media. Likewise, we call on Azerbaijan to create conditions allowing citizens to exercise fully the freedom of assembly.

The EU recalls its strong opposition to capital punishment in all circumstances and calls on Belarus to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a first step towards abolition. We fully support the appeals of the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of Media to Belarus to undertake the reforms necessary for developing favourable and pluralistic media environment, in particular reiterate our call to abolish many provisions restricting the work of media outlets and journalists. They include inter alia criminal defamation and insult, as well as accreditation requirements. We also call on Belarusian authorities to amend legislation regarding freedom of assembly and abolish the prohibitively high fees related to public gatherings which effectively limit exercise of this right. We call on Belarus to follow the recommendations given by ODIHR and amend its electoral code in order to ensure free and fair elections.

The EU continues to follow with great concern the deeply worrying backsliding in Turkey with regards to human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Exercise of freedom of expression has been considerably hampered in recent years and heavy pressure on journalists and the media continues with more than 160 journalists in jail. Space for independent civil society is shrinking dangerously. Turkey's legitimate fight against terrorism cannot justify the repeated arrests of elected local politicians as well as civil society representatives, journalists, lawyers, academics and other critical voices, or other violations of human rights. The EU calls on Turkey to respect human rights, guarantee fundamental freedoms and, in particular ensure a safe, plural and enabling environment for the media and civil society to carry out their work independently and without fear of reprisals.



EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is concerned about the continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, affecting in particular ethnic Georgians. The ongoing violations of freedom of movement, including the continuing “borderization” process and closures of crossing points, the restrictions of property rights and education in native language as well as severe obstacles to the rights of displaced persons are areas of particular concern. The EU reaffirms our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its international recognized borders. The European Union renews its call to the de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to the Russian Federation to reverse these trends.

The EU welcomes recent political reforms in some countries of Central Asia which are having positive outcomes for human rights compliance, while encourages countries of the region where serious human rights violations persists, to achieve tangible reforms for the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU remains strongly committed to the respect of human rights and calls all Central Asian authorities to stop arbitrary extension of prison sentences and unlawful restrictions of freedom of expression and information, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, while also noting some positive developments in the prevention of torture. We remain seriously concerned about the fate of people subject to enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan's prisons. The EU calls on Turkmenistan to take action and eradicate this scourge.

Madam Chair,

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate that no region is immune from facing challenges in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms - nor is the EU. Several challenges do exist and we remain committed to addressing them.

Through dialogue, we stand ready to further exchange on all the various topics in the coming two weeks.

We are looking forward to a constructive meeting, engaging with representatives of all participating States and civil society.

Thank you.



EUROPEAN UNION

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.