



## EUROPEAN UNION

# OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 19 - 30 September 2016

---

## EU statement - Opening Session

---

The European Union expresses its appreciation to the German Chairmanship for its able leadership of the OSCE this year and its tireless effort to make this Meeting take place. Our gratitude also goes to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the thorough preparation of this meeting.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ODIHR, that was initially established as the Office for Free Elections. Today, it is clearly the leading election observation institution in the OSCE area. It has provided valuable expertise to all participating States to strengthen democratic institutions. We praise ODIHR for unwavering support for human rights, for fundamental freedoms and for democratic principles. The European Union will continue to assist its work, especially the implementation of its recommendations and guidelines, because we are convinced that these contribute to peace and stability across the OSCE area.

Mr Chairman,

We need to defend and promote human rights. They lie at the core of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. Security cannot be used as an excuse to crackdown on human rights defenders and political dissidents.

In some States, there are on-going discussions on the need to reintroduce the death penalty. In Belarus - the only country in Europe still actively applying the death penalty – the latest known execution took place last April. The European Union opposes the death penalty in all times and in all circumstances and we urge countries applying it to set up a moratorium as a first step towards its abolition. As also stated by the Director of ODIHR, countries in the



## EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE have committed themselves to consider the complete abolition of capital punishment, not to reconsider that abolition.

Supporting civil society and human rights defenders remains a priority for the European Union. A vigorous and independent civil society is essential in order to ensure protection and promotion of human rights. We therefore welcome and encourage the participation at the HDIM of civil society organisations from across the whole OSCE area.

We must also ensure that the OSCE Institutions remain able to play their indispensable role in the implementation of commitments across the OSCE area. In this connection, we hope for a speedy selection process for the position of the HCNM. We welcome that a first round of candidates' presentations took place on 7 September and call on all participating States to come to a consensus decision in good faith very soon.

Allow me now to refer to specific country situations.

In eastern Ukraine, fighting continues and the humanitarian cost mounts. According to the UN's latest report, since mid-April 2014, up to 2,000 civilians have been killed, mostly as a result of indiscriminate shelling of populated areas and dozens were subjected to summary executions and killings, or died of torture and ill-treatment in custody.

The European Union urges all sides to ensure respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk Agreements and honour their commitments. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to exert its influence over the separatists to meet those commitments in full. We express hope that the recent reinforced ceasefire will bring about a permanent cessation of hostilities.

The European Union also calls for the unimpeded access of the OSCE and other international organisations to the whole territory of Ukraine, including Crimea. We fully support the work of the OSCE, particularly through the Special Monitoring Mission. All sides must fully guarantee the security and safety of the SMM monitors and ensure their unfettered access throughout the country, including the conflict area, as stated by the Chairmanship.



## EUROPEAN UNION

We call on Russia to cease the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. We note with concern the reports by the OHCHR on the violations of human rights and the precarious situation of persons belonging to national minorities in the peninsula, in particular the Crimean Tatars. The decision to ban their Mejlis as well as the persecution of its representatives, including Mr Ilmi Umerov, represent a grave attack on the rights of the Crimean Tatars as a whole.

The European Union reiterates the urgent need for a sustainable political solution based on respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence. We also call on the Russian authorities to free all Ukrainian citizens illegally detained, put on trial, or convicted in Russia.

The European Union remains concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Russia, the curtailing of rights and freedoms, the repression against the opposition and the harassment of independent media. In short, the human rights situation continues to fall below Russia's OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations. We will not comment how this situation affected yesterday's elections. We will wait first for ODIHR's interim assessment.

In Azerbaijan, we call upon the government to provide legal and financial space to its civil society, journalists and political opponents and to guarantee the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. The positive developments seen earlier this year with the release of several human rights defenders and activists should be continued. In a few days, a constitutional referendum will be held in the country. In the debate leading to it, the opposition could not make its voice heard. We encourage the Government to seek the advice of expert institutions on the proposed constitutional changes.

The European Union welcomes positive trends in the cooperation between Belarus and the international community. We regret, however, that it did not fully implement the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations at the recent parliamentary elections. As ODIHR's Preliminary Conclusions note, a number of long-standing systemic shortcomings remain and the legal framework restricts political rights and fundamental freedoms.



## EUROPEAN UNION

The EU welcomes the participation of Turkmenistan in this Meeting and the adoption of a National Human Rights Action Plan. We hope it will contribute to constructive discussions and narrow the gap between the existing legislative framework and its practical implementation.

The European Union also underlines the need to improve the human rights situation in participating States where protracted conflicts exist. It is the obligation not only of States, but also of non-state actors and those in control of areas affected by these protracted conflicts to guarantee and protect the human rights of all people.

Mr Chairman,

Within the European Union, as well, we are faced with serious challenges: Fighting against discrimination and xenophobia, and providing protection to refugees and asylum-seekers are top priorities today. All participating States have responsibilities and obligations in international law. All participating States should try to change the narrative of migration from threat to opportunity and from exclusion to inclusiveness.

No country can manage migration alone. To address the ongoing crisis, the EU has recently adopted a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration to pave the way for sustainable long-term solutions. In line with this Agenda, human rights safeguards are included in the reinforced dialogues and cooperation with partner countries.

We consider that the OSCE is well placed to contribute to the global response to the current crisis, complementing the efforts undertaken by others. The OSCE is also a useful platform for dialogue between countries of origin, transit and destination.

Mr. Chairman,

We are looking forward to a constructive Meeting, which will provide input to the Hamburg Ministerial Council.

Thank you.



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

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 ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, align themselves with this statement.

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