



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1096 Vienna, 14 April 2016

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 to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report. Human Dimension commitments are a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and are a cornerstone of our OSCE comprehensive security concept. In view of the ongoing security threats and crises facing our region, these commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever. The work of the OSCE's autonomous Institutions, including ODIHR, is an essential component of the OSCE's work to uphold security across our region, and we commend ODIHR for its tireless efforts in pursuit of this objective and in support to participating States. Diligence, impartiality and professionalism have again been characteristics of ODIHR's activities over the last twelve months as it discharges the mandate participating States established for it twenty-five years ago.

There are three issues I would like to address in particular in this morning's response to Director Link's report. Firstly, in view of the ongoing human rights challenges the OSCE region, we rely more than ever on ODIHR's continued engagement, particularly on the most pressing issues. At the same time, our commitments also set out that it is the responsibility of participating States – the European Union no less than others – to engage fully with ODIHR, without preconditions. Finally, we wish to reiterate that participating States must sufficiently resource ODIHR to carry out its vital work.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the growing threats to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the shrinking space for civil society in parts of the OSCE region. As we collectively seek to address these challenges we rely on the engagement and impartial assessments and assistance that ODIHR and other OSCE autonomous institutions offer. We therefore particularly welcome ODIHR's continued

efforts to support human rights defenders and promote an enabling environment for their work.

We take this opportunity once again to commend ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities for the human rights assessment mission they undertook last year on the situation in Crimea following its illegal annexation by the Russian Federation. We encourage ODIHR to remain seized of this issue and we call on all relevant actors to follow up on the recommendations of this report, including by ensuring full and unimpeded access for ODIHR, other OSCE actors and other international organisations to the Crimean peninsula. We also thank Director Link for the briefing on ODIHR's possible role in relation to local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We reiterate that local elections must be carried out in accordance with Ukrainian legislation and relevant OSCE standards, and monitored by ODIHR. Established conditions for ODIHR monitoring must be met, including on security and access.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our strong support for ODIHR's work on human rights and fundamental freedoms and on election observation and its methodology based on the principles of impartiality, professionalism and independence. We welcome measures to develop ODIHR's work on torture prevention. We fully support these efforts and encourage ODIHR to address related issues of the death penalty and enforced disappearances within this work. We also appreciate the assistance that ODIHR offers to address challenges stemming from the ongoing refugee and migration crisis and its cooperation on this issue with UNHCR and other relevant agencies. ODIHR has an important role in monitoring compliance with OSCE commitments. The reactivation of ODIHR's work on combating trafficking in human beings is further welcome development.

Director Link's report highlights the increased engagement on a number of issues by participating States with ODIHR. This is a very positive development. We commend those participating States who actively seek ODIHR's assistance and engage constructively in response to recommendations ODIHR has provided. Unfortunately this has not been the case in every situation, as statements in the Permanent Council during the last twelve months attest. Engaging fully and cooperatively with ODIHR, without placing preconditions, is a responsibility to which all participating States have committed themselves.

The reported increase in requests for assistance from ODIHR by participating States serves to underline the valuable expertise that ODIHR offers participating States and the crucial contribution it is making to addressing human rights challenges in our region. It therefore remains deeply regrettable that ODIHR continues to be under-resourced through the Unified Budget. ODIHR continues to do an exceptional job in the face of its current resource constraints, but the current situation is not sustainable. If it prevails, it will be detrimental not only to the impact of ODIHR's work but also to our collective efforts to uphold our human rights commitments and ensure comprehensive security across the OSCE region. We recognise that ODIHR must be sufficiently resourced and we call again on other participating States to ensure that ODIHR receives necessary funds through the Unified Budget.

Finally, and looking ahead to this afternoon's Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, we want to express our support for ODIHR's continued engagement on tolerance and non-discrimination issues, particularly its work on hate crime. As we consider further OSCE efforts in this area, it is important that we maintain a comprehensive and universal human rights based approach to this issue.

Director Link, we thank you again for your report and wish you and your excellent team every success in the coming year.

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 countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members 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.