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Opening session

EU Opening Statement HDIM 2009

Mr Chairman/Madame Chairperson, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the opening session of the 2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on behalf of the European Union. At the outset, I would like to express the European Union's gratitude to the Government of Poland for once again hosting this meeting. Our appreciation also goes to the Greek Chairmanship for its firm steering of the ship. In addition, I would like to direct a special thanks to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) - Director Janez Lenarčič and his team - for organising this event and its tireless efforts to assist participating States in fulfilling their human dimension commitments.

Mr Chairman/Madame Chairperson,

History has shown repeatedly that without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms there will be no security, and without security, human rights and fundamental freedoms can never be fully

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enjoyed. This link was recognised in the Helsinki Final Act and is a cornerstone of the concept of comprehensive security on which the OSCE is based. It continues to be a key guiding principle in the dialogue on the future of European security and the Corfu follow-up process. The EU finds that it is a fundamental humanistic imperative to discourage and oppose violations of human rights wherever they occur.

In other OSCE contexts, the EU has stressed that discussions on European Security can not take place in a vacuum. The same goes for discussions in the Human Dimension. When we talk about implementation of our commitments within the Human Dimension we must be sincere, open and frank, otherwise improvements will not be possible. We must recognise that not all participating States fulfil all their obligations. We can neither close our eyes, nor refrain from attempting to address these issues. No country holds a perfect record in terms of human rights and fundamental freedoms and I am confident that as partners we can view constructive criticism with an open mind. Working together we can highlight where we need to reinforce our efforts to live up to our common commitments and share experiences that can benefit implementation across the region. Human dimension commitments are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of a State, as was recalled by our Ministers last year in Helsinki.

Mr Chairman/Madame Chairperson,

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is a unique forum for dialogue between participating States, international organisations

and representatives of civil society on issues that have direct relevance and impact on all persons in our region. The EU particularly welcomes this opportunity for dialogue with civil society. We commend the dedication of non-governmental organizations and other human rights defenders who, sometimes under very difficult circumstances, scrutinise Governments' compliance with human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such acts should not be regarded as inimical or threatening, but as serving to uphold commitments that participating States have agreed to.

The situation of human rights defenders is of particular concern to the EU. In some OSCE participating States the situation of human rights defenders, as well as journalists, is particularly grim. Examples of undue restrictions on the freedoms of association and expression, as well as threats and violence aggravated by an atmosphere of impunity for the perpetrators remain all too common. The EU is also concerned by continued violence and discrimination motivated by intolerance based on grounds such as ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, disability or sexual orientation and gender identity. The EU will return to these and other equally important issues in more detail during the coming working sessions.

I would like to highlight especially that the EU Presidency, together with the European Fundamental Rights Agency, next week will arrange a side-event on the theme freedom of expression on the internet, where the panel will highlight how traditional human rights relates to modern developments with its new challenges and possibilities.

Mr Chairman/Madame Chairperson,

The EU would like to take this opportunity to express its strong support for the ODIHR. The expertise of the ODIHR and its professional and impartial conduct of business, in particular in the field of election observations, makes it exceptional and the EU will continue to stand up for its autonomy.

In closing, allow me to assure you that the EU will actively participate in the coming discussions with a view of promoting implementation of our common commitments and thereby further contributing to consolidate the human dimension of security within the OSCE.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.