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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 21 September – 2 October 2015

EU Statement – Closing Session

Mr Moderator

The European Union and its Member States thank the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship for their organisation of another valuable Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Our thanks also to Poland, which has once again kindly hosted this meeting.

Most of all we want to express our appreciation to the human rights defenders and representatives of independent civil society, who have testified during the different sessions and at side events, regarding their experiences and the situation facing them in their states. We have listened carefully, and often with great concern, to the issues they have raised.

This meeting's particular strength is the extent to which independent civil society can participate actively, and the depth of its representation. Civil society are an important partner for the implementation of human dimension commitments. Their work and independence should neither be restricted nor instrumentalised. Such actions do not build trust and confidence, or help create common ground among participating States. We remain gravely concerned by the growing restrictions on civil society, and efforts to silence dissenting voices, manifest in parts of the OSCE region. We have spoken out, and will continue to do so, against so-called "foreign agent" and other laws that unduly restrict the rights to freedom of association, assembly, and expression, or the use of flawed trials to imprison journalists and human rights defenders. We want to express particular concern at steps the government of Tajikistan has taken, including the arrest of opposition politicians and a lawyer acting



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on their behalf, whilst we have been meeting here in Warsaw. Fundamental freedoms must continue to be guaranteed, online and offline, even as a state acts to address threats to its security, including terrorism, not least because violations of human rights can become a significant additional source of instability.

Reprisals by some OSCE participating States against civil society who raise human rights concerns in multilateral fora has also cast a shadow over this meeting. We recall the absence this year of many civil society representatives who have participated in previous meetings, because of imprisonment, travel restrictions, or simply out of fear of what might happen to them or their families if they did attend. They are not forgotten. We also commend those who have attended and courageously spoken out. Be assured we are with you, and we remain committed to supporting and protecting human rights defenders.

Mr Moderator

If the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting forms the basis of the participating States' annual report card on human rights, the assessment is clear: must do better. It is a message that applies to all of us. The European Union and its Member States are not without their own challenges and shortcomings. We acknowledge that. However, we have also established strong laws and democratic institutions, including independent judiciaries, to protect the human rights of our citizens. In addition, we are seeking continuously to facilitate and protect the growth of vibrant, open societies where all opinions, including criticism of the government, can be freely expressed without fear of imprisonment.

The conclusions of this conference are not a final judgement on our states. The true test of participating States' willingness to uphold the OSCE commitments, and the strength of the OSCE security community, will be their response. As a first step, all participating States need to rededicate themselves to implementing in full our OSCE



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commitments and taking immediate measures to reverse the violations of these principles that we have witnessed, most notably through Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and support to illegal armed groups in eastern Ukraine. We share the concerns expressed in the ODIHR/HCNM human rights assessment mission on the situation of human rights in illegally annexed Crimea and call for the implementation of its recommendations, as well as for immediate and unrestricted access for the OSCE institutions to this region.

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. These commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever. The Ministerial Council in Belgrade offers an opportunity for participating States to reaffirm their OSCE commitments and strengthen them further. This meeting has confirmed our assessment that the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association, gender equality, as well as torture prevention, including fighting against enforced disappearances, must be a central part of the Ministerial Council's agenda in the human dimension. We note also that this year the abolition of the death penalty has received additional support from many participating States.

However, political commitments are not enough. Words must be translated into action. We call on all participating States to embrace independent civil society as a partner. In this regard, we welcome the presence at this meeting of a delegation from Turkmenistan. Participating States need to engage with civil society and the international community on human rights issues of concern, and Turkmenistan's attendance at HDIM this year is a positive first step in this regard. We encourage Turkmenistan to deepen dialogue with its citizens, particularly with the families of the "disappeared" and to allow greater space for civil society.

In the OSCE Executive Structures, and notably the three autonomous Institutions, participating States also have a valuable resource to aid them in fulfilling their human



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rights commitments. We call on all participating States to recognise the supportive role they can play, resource them fully, and to the few that do so, desist from attacking their consensually agreed mandates. Director Link, Representative Mijatovic, High Commissioner Thors, be assured of our full support for your work and that of your offices in the coming year.

Mr Moderator

Over the last two weeks we have focused on the implementation of commitments. That is the nature of this meeting set out in its founding documents. Therefore it is only right that participants look critically at the policies of participating States. Some incorrectly perceive such criticisms as shaming. However, the shame is not in having shortcomings, the shame is in choosing not to address them. This Human Dimension Implementation Meeting has been another important moment to look back. We hope that now all participating States will agree to move forward.

Thank you.

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, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, 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.