



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1164
Vienna, 16 November 2017**

**EU Statement in Response to the Address by the
Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe
Mr. Nils Muiznieks**

The European Union welcomes back to the Permanent Council the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Mr. Nils Muiznieks and we thank you for your address. The EU highly values your work and we applaud your efforts to advance the human rights situation in Europe.

Cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe is longstanding and it is based on the shared values of human rights, democracy and rule of law. This year the EU and Council of Europe celebrate ten years of cooperation on the basis of the MoU which has enhanced the multi-faceted cooperation between the two organizations.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe have a well-established and long-lasting relationship, based on shared principles, commitments and a common goal: the promotion of peace, stability and security on the basis of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights in Europe and beyond. Such promotion is, for the OSCE, an integral part of its comprehensive security concept. All participating States have recognized that human rights are the birthright of all human beings and are inalienable and guaranteed by law. It is incumbent on us to implement all the human rights commitments which we as States have signed up to in their entirety. Whether they are legal or political commitments undertaken in the Council of Europe and in the OSCE, we all have an obligation to deliver on them for the sake of our common security. Strengthening and promoting the protection of human rights across the OSCE region is therefore at the heart of the Organization's work.

We welcome the continuous dialogue and practical cooperation between the OSCE and Council of Europe in the identified priority areas: fight against terrorism, combatting trafficking in human beings, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities. For these priority areas we would appreciate if you could share with us your thoughts on how to make the best use of the comparative advantages and added value of both Organizations.

In your work you have highlighted a range of important human rights challenges facing our region, both thematic as well as country specific situations. We share many of the concerns you have expressed: the shrinking space for civil society organizations and growing pressure on human rights defenders and on freedom of assembly; the precarious situation of human rights defenders addressing women's rights and gender equality, also a priority for the EU; threats to freedom of the media and growing pressures on journalists. You also called attention to the defense of human rights of LGBTI persons and Roma; to human rights protection in counter-terrorism, security and migration; to fighting racism and intolerance; to combating trafficking in human beings.

We also appreciate your attention to the situation in Ukraine. We recall your visit to the country and report of July last year. Upon its release, you stated that “the conflict in the east of Ukraine remains the cause of enormous human suffering and loss of life.” The situation has unfortunately not improved since then. In the report you stressed the need for ensuring effective prosecution and sanctioning of those responsible for human rights violations. We share your concerns regarding the death penalty in areas held by Russia-backed separatists as well as enforced disappearances, ill-treatment and torture, which we condemn.

As you know, the human rights situation on the Crimean Peninsula is alarming since the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. Since your visit to the peninsula in 2014, there have been new serious developments and deepening repression of those opposing the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, including the banning of the activities of the Mejlis of Crimean Tatars and persecution of their leaders. You have

expressed your concern for this and urged to reverse the ban in the interests of human rights protection and social cohesion on the Peninsula. The EU shares all of these concerns. In this regard we would welcome your views on how regular access of international human rights monitoring bodies could be re-established in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and, more broadly, how the OSCE and the Council of Europe could further cooperate in tackling the most urgent human rights challenges stemming from the conflict.

In concluding, the EU thanks you, Commissioner Muiznieks, for your engagement during your tenure and we look forward to continuing the good cooperation with you for the rest of your term.

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 NORWAY, 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.