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

EU statement - Closing Session

The European Union thanks the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, now at its 25th anniversary, as well as the German OSCE Chairmanship for organizing another valuable Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. We would also like to thank Poland, which has once again kindly hosted this meeting.

We thank the human rights defenders, representatives of civil society and journalists who have actively engaged in the discussions, some of them giving worrying testimonies on their experience and the situation they face in their respective countries. We commend their courage and we reaffirm our constant commitment to support and protect human rights defenders.

HDIM is an opportunity for all of us to be held to account in relation to our OSCE commitments. We, the European Union and its Member States, have listened carefully to the concerns and recommendations directed at us. We acknowledge our own challenges and shortcomings, and we remain committed to addressing them and to continuing a genuine dialogue with independent civil society. HDIM provides a unique platform to interact with civil society, whose independence and work should neither be restricted nor instrumentalised. They are an essential partner for the implementation of Human Dimension commitments.

Regrettably, once more, some participating States prevented civil society representatives from participating in this meeting by imposing travel restrictions. We are concerned by disturbing reports that some states, for instance Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, tried to intimidate and punish them - or their family members - for exercising their rights by taking part in HDIM. We call on all participating States to refrain from such unacceptable actions and abide by their OSCE commitments. It is States' responsibility to ensure that



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those who speak up for human rights, be it in their home countries, or in any international fora, are protected.

We also regret that, while facing criticism, some participating States have chosen to leave HDIM and not engage in further exchange of views. And, once more, some participating States have chosen to instrumentalise civil society in their attempt to discredit independent voices.

We were pleased to see Turkmenistan present again at this HDIM meeting and we call on the authorities to engage in dialogue with civil society and its citizens, particularly with the families of the “disappeared”.

This year’s meeting pointed out the ongoing or even increasing restrictions on civil society and crackdown in human rights and fundamental freedoms in parts of the OSCE region. We see a downward trend in this regard across much of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Russia. Time and again we have spoken out against so-called “foreign agent” and other similar restrictive laws that unjustifiably limit the rights to freedom of association, assembly, and expression, or the use of flawed trials to silence critical voices. Fundamental freedoms must continue to be guaranteed, online and offline, even as a State acts to address terrorism threats. Security and human rights go hand in hand. We continue to be alarmed by attacks on journalists, and the effects of disinformation campaigns and propaganda on the media space in the OSCE region.

We believe the EU Human Rights dialogue processes with all five Central Asian states are a means to further promoting cooperation also in line with OSCE commitments.

We share the concerns expressed regarding the human rights situation in areas of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russia-backed separatists and in Crimea, illegally annexed by Russia, in particular the precarious situation of Crimean Tatars. We remain firm in our non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia, which we have constantly repeated during this meeting as some participants attempted to use a legitimate opportunity for discussion and dialogue and make points relating to a situation that is in contradiction with Helsinki principles. Regarding areas of eastern Ukraine



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controlled by Russia-backed separatists, we remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full. We reiterate our call for full, immediate and unrestricted access for the OSCE institutions as well as for other international actors in these areas. We reiterate EU's unwavering support to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence in line with the OSCE principles and commitments. We are equally concerned by the human rights situation in areas affected by protracted conflicts and we reiterate that it is the obligation not only of States, but also of non-state actors and those in control of these areas, to guarantee and protect the human rights of all people.

We also expressed our concerns that there are on-going discussions on the need to reintroduce the death penalty. We express our concern regarding Belarus - the only country in Europe still actively applying the death penalty. The EU opposes the death penalty in all times and in all circumstances and urges countries applying it to set up a moratorium as a first step towards its abolition.

Attention was drawn to the situation in Turkey with regard to rule of law and fundamental freedoms. The EU has a strong commitment to dialogue and common work with Turkey, including ensuring the defence of democratic principles and respect for human rights and the rule of law .

The last two weeks have proven, once more, that OSCE commitments are more relevant than ever and we call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations. All participating States must respect the mandates and the roles of ODIHR, HCNM and RFoM as essential instruments in their efforts to fulfil the OSCE commitments. We reiterate our constant support for the work and the mandates of the three autonomous institutions. We must also ensure that the OSCE institutions are adequately resourced to play their indispensable role.

The meeting has also reminded us of the need to advance efforts in the field of women, peace and security, to ensure full gender equality, as well as to fight all forms of discrimination in an inclusive and human-rights based manner. Human rights,



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fundamental freedoms, rule of law and democratic principles – highlighted and discussed during these two weeks of HDIM – lie at the core of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. They remain the focus of EU as we look towards the upcoming OSCE Ministerial Council. We see the meeting in Hamburg as a good opportunity to take forward recommendations from our meeting with the aim of reaffirming and strengthening our OSCE Human Dimension commitments. We very much welcome the input of civil society in this regard.

This year we showed great flexibility to compromise with respect to the agenda of this meeting. We note that is without prejudice for the future.

Thank you.

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, align themselves with this statement.

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