



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1141
Vienna, 6 April 2017**

**EU statement in response to the report by ODIHR Director
Michael Link**

The European Union warmly welcomes Director Michael Link back to the Permanent Council and we thank him for his detailed report.

Director Link, as this is your last appearance in the Permanent Council before the end of your tenure as ODIHR Director, we would like to thank you for the way you discharged the mandate of this autonomous institution in the last three years. We thank you for your professionalism, integrity and impartiality, as well as for your tremendous efforts to stand up for the principles and commitments we all committed to. Our appreciation goes also to the entire staff of ODIHR for their dedicated service to this organisation and to the participating States.

Mr, Chairperson, since Director Link took office in 2014, we have been facing ongoing or even increasing restrictions on civil society and crackdown in human rights and fundamental freedoms in parts of the OSCE region. Director Link has been addressing some of these worrying trends: denouncing the use of new legislation to unduly restrict the freedoms of expression, association, assembly and of thought, conscience, religion or belief, as well as to silence dissenting voices; the abusing and undermining of the rule of law to imprison those who speak out against such repressive measures; attacks on human rights defenders, persistence of death penalty, as well as of practices of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or punishment.

Director Link's tenure has been marked by the consequences of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. In a common report with the High Commissioner on National Minorities in 2015, ODIHR assessed the human rights situation in the Peninsula, including with reference to the precarious situation of Crimean Tatars. 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. The human rights violations in areas of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russia-backed separatists must also remain in the attention of ODIHR.

In view of these and other ongoing security threats and crises facing our region, our OSCE commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever. We call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations. Human dimension commitments are a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States, as reconfirmed in Moscow 1991, and are a cornerstone of our OSCE comprehensive security concept. Our commitments set out that it is the responsibility of participating States – the European Union Member States no less than others – to engage fully with ODIHR, without preconditions. We commend those participating States who actively seek ODIHR's assistance and engage constructively in response to recommendations ODIHR has provided.

We reiterate our full support to ODIHR's internationally recognised election observation methodology. We attach great importance to the recommendations emerging from the OSCE Election Observation Missions, both inside and outside the EU, and remain committed to following up on them.

We welcome ODIHR's continued efforts to support human rights defenders and promote an enabling environment for their work, assist civil society organizations and the developed work on torture prevention. We value the expert guidance that ODIHR has continued to offer to participating States – on ensuring the rule of law, respecting fundamental freedoms, strengthening political participation and democratic institutions, promoting tolerance and combating all forms of discrimination, including preventing and combating hate crime, promoting gender equality and combating gender-based violence, and promoting rights of persons with disabilities.

We also value the work of ODIHR when it comes to organising the Human Dimension events, an opportunity for all of us to engage meaningfully with civil society and to be held to account in relation to our OSCE commitments. We believe that broad participation of civil society representatives is of great value to Human Dimension events. The open and inclusive character of these events needs to be maintained. At the same time it is the responsibility of us all, the participating States, to adopt in time

the Decisions regarding the Human Dimension events, allowing thus ODIHR and the OSCE Chairmanship to prepare these meetings. We also welcome the contribution of ODIHR more generally in other OSCE meetings and events in all three dimensions.

We believe that ODIHR must be sufficiently staffed and resourced to carry out its vital work and we call again on other participating States to ensure that ODIHR receives necessary funds through the Unified Budget.

Director Link, your work as Director ODIHR has earned you great respect. We stress the need for a timely appointment of your successor that would allow for a seamless transition. We wish you all success in your future endeavours.

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.