



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 970
Vienna, 7 November 2013**

**EU statement in response to the Report by the Director of
ODIHR, H.E. Ambassador Janez Lenarčič**

The European Union (EU) and its Member States welcome Ambassador Janez Lenarčič back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report and his presentation. We would also like to thank him and his dedicated team for the excellent preparation of the 2013 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM).

The EU repeats its call for participating States to make continuous and enhanced efforts to ensure full implementation of OSCE commitments, particularly in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The HDIM represents a unique peer review mechanism during which participating States hold each other to account and are held to account by civil society for the fulfilment of their commitments.

Thus, we express our gratitude to the representatives of civil society, including human rights defenders, for their observations and contributions which provide concrete assessments of how we live up to our commitments. Unrestricted civil society participation on an equal footing with government representatives makes the HDIM unique among human rights events. Nevertheless, we cannot disregard an apparent tendency, on the part of some delegations, to instrumentalise NGOs. We believe that this does not contribute to building trust and confidence or creating common ground among participating States.

We were disappointed that not all participating States made use of this opportunity to engage in a dialogue with other participating States and civil society on the implementation of their commitments.

We encourage all participating States to follow up where challenges to their implementation of commitments have been highlighted.

We see today a worrying trend of human rights and fundamental freedoms increasingly being challenged in parts of our region. It is therefore encouraging that this year's HDIM has again highlighted a number of good practices and concrete recommendations on each topic discussed. However, our assessment of the discussions is that a lot still needs to be done in order to ensure the following, that:

- freedom of expression and media freedom, including safety of journalists and freedom of expression online and offline are guaranteed;
- all forms of intolerance and discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity or religion and belief are contested;
- freedom of religion or belief, for every person, irrespective of religious denomination or non-belief is promoted and protected;
- freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed without imposing restrictions on organisations' and individuals' right to associate;
- Human rights defenders and their work are protected;
- our election-related commitments are fully implemented;
- gender equality is promoted;
- the rule of law and, in particular, an independent judicial system are guaranteed;
- efforts to improve social inclusion of Roma and Sinti are enhanced; and
- the death penalty is abolished.

This assessment shows how much the activities of ODIHR and the other autonomous Institutions are needed to help improve the implementation of OSCE commitments in all these fields. We heard in Warsaw that many delegations have appreciated ODIHR's guidance and advice, and it has helped them on their path of democratic reform.

We support more robust follow-up to all human dimension events, including on the recommendations we have heard from the Director today. We remain

committed to enhancing the effectiveness of these events. We consider that holding the HDIM earlier in the year and agreeing a standing agenda would contribute towards a more effective review of the implementation of our human dimension commitments and share best practice.

In our view, HDIM has provided us with valuable input for our future deliberations, particularly as we approach the Kyiv Ministerial Council and discuss the draft decisions tabled by the Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office on some of the very pertinent topics on our Human Dimension agenda.

Mr Chairman,

Discussion in HDIM underlined the importance of ODIHR's successful work in the area of election observation. We reiterate our full support for and confidence in ODIHR's observation methodology. It is based on the principles of independence, impartiality and professionalism, endorsed by participating States in Ministerial Council Decision 19/06 and has been followed by numerous international actors, including the EU, in their own election observation activities. ODIHR's approach is also based on the premise that an election is more than just a one-day event and covers all the elements necessary for a democratic electoral process. It is important that participating States adhere to their commitment to issue timely invitations, without restrictions, to ODIHR to observe their elections. It is essential that follow-up on ODIHR's election-related recommendations is improved, also by voluntary reporting of participating States on their related implementation measures. ODIHR must be enabled to fulfil its mandate, and we therefore underline the importance of providing ODIHR with adequate resources.

In conclusion, we would like to take this opportunity to express our full support for the work performed by Ambassador Lenarčič and his staff and highly commend the professional, effective and transparent manner in which ODIHR fulfils its mandate.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO, align themselves with this statement.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.