



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Human Dimension Seminar

***The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in  
promoting and protection human rights in the OSCE area  
Warsaw, 1-3 June 2015***

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#### **EU Statement – Opening Session**

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1. The European Union thanks the Serbian Chairmanship and ODIHR for organising this Human Dimension Seminar, and also wishes to express our appreciation to Poland for once again hosting this event.
2. We also wish to thank our keynote speaker for his address. The EU fully supports the work of the Ombudsman in Serbia. We also welcome the decision of the Serbian Chairmanship to invite their Ombudsman as the keynote speaker. This is a positive signal regarding cooperation between the Serbian Government and the Ombudsman, which we hope will be maintained.
3. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are an essential component of national and international efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. NHRIs often form a bridge between the rights of the citizen and the responsibilities of the state. Through education and training the work of NHRIs compliments the efforts of states to uphold the rights of their citizens. At the same time, through human rights monitoring and ensuring redress for violations, NHRIs are a tool through which citizens can further hold their governments accountable to their human rights commitments. In this regard, some NHRIs play a particularly important role in torture prevention as designated National Preventative Mechanisms. NHRIs are also often the only institution in a state that can and does speak out in defence of human rights defenders, including women defenders, and members of vulnerable groups.



## EUROPEAN UNION

We welcome the specific attention that will be devoted to these aspects of the work of NHRIs during the seminar.

Mr Chairperson,

4. To fulfil their important role, NHRIs must be effective and independent, equipped with sufficient resources and the requisite competence to promote and protect the full spectrum of rights. In other words, NHRIs must adhere to the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions, known as the Paris Principles.
5. The European Union attaches the highest importance to NHRIs. Though not all Member States have NHRIs accredited through the International Coordinating Committee for National Human Rights Institutions (ICC), the EU fully recognises the importance of such institutions and encourages and supports their establishment. The European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) partners with NHRIs, and other national human rights bodies within the EU as well as assists EU Member States in strengthening them. For example in 2012 FRA produced a handbook on the establishment and accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions in the European Union.
6. Partnering with NHRIs is also an important element of the EU's external action on human rights. NHRIs are an increasingly important partner for the EU in the context of our bilateral human rights dialogues with countries. We also see them as a key actor in building local ownership within states on human rights issues. The EU has been providing assistance to partners in the OSCE region, and beyond, in the development of NHRIs, and we are currently discussing how to strengthen this support, as we develop a new EU Action Plan on Human Rights for the period 2015-2019.



## EUROPEAN UNION

Mr Chairperson,

7. National Human Rights Institutions can also serve as a bridge between states and international organisations. NHRIs bring independent expertise and local knowledge to discussions at the international level, particularly in the UN Human Rights Council. It is crucial that this status is preserved. NHRIs are a valued interlocutor too in the OSCE and we believe there is scope to strengthen and potentially increase their participation in OSCE discussions, in a manner similar to the UN model.
8. The EU also very much welcomes the bridges that NHRI networks such as the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) are building between NHRIs globally. The peer to peer exchanges and technical assistance that these networks are developing are a crucial contribution to strengthening the effectiveness of NHRIs. We welcome too the partnerships that that the OSCE, particularly ODIHR, is developing with NHRIs and NHRI networks, and we encourage them to deepen this cooperation.
9. To conclude, the EU looks forward to the discussions over the coming days and to hearing from NHRIs and civil society as to how their important work can be better supported. We will pay careful attention to the recommendations emerging from this event.

Thank you

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\*, and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, align themselves with this statement.

\* Montenegro, and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.