



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting Rule of Law and protection of human rights Vienna, 11-12 July 2013

EU remarks – Closing session

We would like to offer some brief reflections on the interesting discussions that have taken place during this SHDM and its two side events. The meeting has covered a broad range of issues but we would like draw attention to what we have heard about the law being used to restrict rather than promote the enjoyment of human rights.

Whilst civil society attendance has not been as plentiful as at previous SHDMs, we pay tribute to their active participation in this and other human dimension events. Their detailed knowledge of the human rights situation in their respective countries provides the international community with invaluable insights. Their role in protecting and promoting human rights should never be underestimated.

We have heard examples of ways in which the rule of law is being used as a tool to obstruct and control the activities of those NGOs and human rights defenders. Many of these restrictions often violate our common OSCE commitments as well as international human rights law, such as the freedom of expression and the freedom of association and assembly.

The importance of Civil Society's role in promoting human rights has been recognised in several OSCE commitments. But independent NGO communities face an existential threat in some OSCE countries. We call on all OSCE states to facilitate an environment that enables and strengthens civil society's ability to give voice to their citizens and hold their governments to account.

To conclude, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is not only a responsibility of every State towards everyone within their jurisdiction. It is a responsibility towards the international community as a whole, and therefore forms a critical part of the rule of law. These fundamental values establish parameters that ensure that the rule "*of law*" is more than simply the rule "*by law*".