



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2013
Warsaw, 26 September 2013**

EU statement – Working Session 6 FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Madame Moderator,

The EU continues to attach utmost importance to the promotion and protection of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in all of its aspects. Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right that needs to be protected everywhere for everyone. The EU is of the opinion that freedom of religion or belief is an individual right which can be exercised in community with others. It applies equally to all persons. It is a fundamental freedom that includes all religions or beliefs, including those that have not been traditionally practised in a particular country, the beliefs of persons belonging to religious minorities, as well as non-theistic and atheistic beliefs. It is also an essential pillar of safe and prosperous societies. On the contrary, its absence breeds distrust and uncertainty, undermines political viability and endangers security.

The EU, through all of its actions, endeavours to ensure observance of the universal nature of this freedom, which concerns the right of a person to have, to manifest, to adopt, to

change, or to abandon one's religion or belief, including the right to live without religious conviction or activity. Implementation of OSCE commitments remains a key priority for the EU, which is also reflected by embedding freedom of religion or belief within its human rights strategic framework and action plan, adopted on June 25th of last year. As a concrete action deriving from that plan, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted specific Guidelines in June 2013 that contain clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief worldwide, including within the EU. Furthermore, freedom of religion or belief continues to feature prominently in the overall EU human rights policy, in bilateral meetings, EU Human Rights Dialogues and EU efforts at multilateral fora, including the OSCE.

The EU expresses its concern that serious instances of discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religion or belief, including acts of violence, intimidation and coercion against individuals and members of religious communities, continue to occur in parts of the OSCE area. The EU believes that there is an urgent need for vigilance and action in this regard. The promotion and protection of rights of persons belonging to religious minorities deserve specific attention and need to be addressed in the most efficient and comprehensive manner. We emphasise that the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to limitations necessary to protect public safety, order, or the fundamental freedoms of others.

The EU stresses that intra- and interreligious dialogue, education and cooperation are key to fostering a climate of mutual respect, understanding and inclusiveness across our societies, but they cannot substitute the need to ensure the fundamental right of each and every individual to freedom of religion or belief. We stress the active role civil society, independent national human rights institutions and a free media can play in this respect, and call on all States, in all circumstances, to put in place conditions for the safeguarding of freedom of religion or belief.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, 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, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, 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.