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**STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION
AT THE OSCE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING
ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMAN CONTACTS**

26 April 2013

Closing session

Distinguished Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights,

Freedom of movement is a fundamental right and a central value of the European Union (EU), both in terms of free movement within the EU and in its relations with third States. From this point of view, the Helsinki Final Act, in reminding us that freedom of movement is as much a fundamental freedom as other liberties, remains as valid as ever. In that regard, at this human dimension meeting, we were expecting to be able to talk further about what constitutes the basis of our OSCE commitments concerning freedom of movement, namely, the right of all citizens to leave and return to their country, as well as the freedom to travel within their country and to freely choose their place of residence in their country. Improving freedom of movement for human rights defenders and electoral observers should have been among the top priorities for the implementation of this fundamental freedom. The issue of freedom of movement for displaced persons was introduced by several delegations and organizations, but did not strike a chord with many participants.

During the discussions of the past two days, we were struck by the fact that most of the statements raised questions relating to visa procedures, and specifically to the bilateral agreements between the EU and third States, without taking into account the titles of the various sessions.

We regret that the OSCE commitments regarding freedom of movement were reduced solely to visa issues by some participating States. In some cases, moreover, this was done in a very polemical fashion, using doubtful historical parallels such as the “Schengen wall”.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that the commitments regarding visas are both specific and limited. They deal with three facets: (1) ensuring that visa application procedures are not more complicated than is necessary; (2) endeavouring to reduce the costs of visas to the extent possible; and (3) encouraging co-operation between authorities in order to create conditions that could foster the liberalization of visas.

In the EU, these commitments are implemented in good faith, and all bilateral agreements with third countries take into account these three major aspects of the OSCE

commitments. We think that the statement by the keynote speaker from the European Commission highlighted this very well.

The statements dealt almost exclusively with possible areas for improvement in these various bilateral agreements, such as the mobility partnerships, the visa dialogues and the visa facilitation agreements. We listened carefully to these comments and will transmit them to the competent bodies. But it must be acknowledged that many suggestions are contradictory or specific to the situation of each participating State. In particular, they raise very technical and intricate issues (consulates' working procedures, organized crime, counter-terrorism, illegal immigration) that do not fall primarily within the OSCE human dimension, unless we focus on the "human rights" aspects of these issues. From this point of view, we are not convinced that a ministerial decision, if it were to reflect the content of the discussions at this meeting, would have added value.

The statements showed in particular that most of the problems that have arisen, and the suggestions for improvement, are specific and technical and could usefully be dealt with bilaterally through the mechanisms provided for in each of the agreements and dialogues. We call on our OSCE partners to give priority to the existing, appropriate and specific channels for improving our co-operation regarding visas in order to mutually increase our freedom of movement and to further contacts between people.

Thank you.

The acceding country Croatia, the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia¹, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Free Trade Association member Norway, align themselves with this statement.

1 Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.