



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1219
Vienna, 7 March 2019**

**EU Statement in response to the report of ODIHR Director,
Ingibjörg Gísladóttir**

The European Union warmly welcomes Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttir back to the Permanent Council and we thank her for the detailed report. We thank you for your professionalism, integrity and impartiality in fulfilling the mandate of this autonomous institution. Our appreciation goes, as always, also to the entire staff of ODIHR for their dedicated service to this Organisation and to the participating States.

Full respect for democratic principles, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential for our common security in Europe. We share your view with regard to some of the current challenges to our democracies: the shrinking space for civil society and the hostile and risky environment for human rights defenders, the restrictive legislation aimed at silencing the civil society and dissenting voices, the misuse of legislation under security pretext to unduly restrict the freedoms of expression, association, assembly and of thought, conscience, religion or belief, the abuse of the rule of law to imprison those who speak out against repressive measures, as well as increasing intolerance. We would also add intimidation and violence against journalists and other media actors, the persistence of death penalty, as well as of practices of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or punishment.

In view of these serious security threats, our OSCE commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever, and we call on all participating States to live up to them and reverse existing violations. Human dimension commitments are a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States, as agreed in Moscow in 1991 and reaffirmed at the Astana Summit in 2010, and are a cornerstone of our OSCE comprehensive security concept. We welcome that at the latest Ministerial Council in Milan we strengthened our commitments in a few areas. Our commitments set out

that it is the responsibility of participating States – the European Union Member States no less than others – to engage fully with ODIHR, without preconditions. We commend those participating States who actively seek ODIHR's assistance and engage constructively in response to recommendations ODIHR has provided.

We reiterate our full support to ODIHR's internationally recognised election observation methodology, encompassing both long-term and short-term observation. We attach great importance to the recommendations emerging from the OSCE election observation missions, both inside and outside the EU, and remain committed to following up on them. We welcome that there is a significant increase in the number of states following up on ODIHR recommendations to strengthen their electoral laws and practice, while noting that some longstanding challenges remain and need to be further addressed. In this context, we stress once again our commitment to ensuring adequate funding and secondment of observers for undertaking all election observation demands. Election monitoring is a valuable tool for the promotion of democratization and respect for human rights across our region. We also welcome that the project “Support to Elections in the Western Balkans”, funded by the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency, created the conditions for establishing a centralized and searchable database of electoral recommendations to support institutions and civil society across the region in their follow up efforts.

We welcome ODIHR's continued efforts to support and train human rights defenders and promote an enabling environment for their work, assist civil society organizations and the continuous work on torture prevention, for instance on developing new tools to assist participating States in implementing standards for the treatment of prisoners and ensuring human dignity. We also value the expert guidance that ODIHR has continued to offer to participating States, including to many EU Member States, on ensuring the rule of law, respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening political participation and democratic institutions, improving the situation and promoting participation of Roma and Sinti, in particular women and youth, and promoting tolerance and combating all forms of discrimination. We have constantly promoted an inclusive and comprehensive approach to combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, based on the universality of human rights. We look forward to future activities of ODIHR building on the good results of the projects *Turning Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism* and *Building a*

Comprehensive Criminal Justice Response to Hate Crimes and addressing intolerance and all forms of discrimination in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. We share ODIHR's assessment on the need to enhance our response to hate crimes, and in this context ODIHR capacity building activities for civil society, the training for law enforcement and prosecutors, the toolkit on comprehensive approach to countering hate crimes, as well as the work on education are extremely relevant and much needed. We encourage all participating States to step up their efforts to ensure adequate reporting of hate crimes to ODIHR. We also appreciate your close cooperation with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in this area.

These days we are marking five years since Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, a violation of international law which we do not recognise and continue to condemn. As we stated in our statement in the Permanent Council last week, we remain gravely concerned about the dire human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula, even more so since we were given an insight at a side-event where we heard moving testimonies from civil society representatives, lawyers and relatives of those persecuted and illegally detained under unacceptable conditions and without access to the needed medical care. We therefore commend your activities for human rights defenders working on human rights issues in Crimea. We encourage you to continue to follow closely and report on this issue, while we call again on all relevant actors to follow up on the recommendations of the 2015 ODIHR/HCNM Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea, including by ensuring full and unimpeded access for ODIHR, other OSCE actors and other international organisations to the Crimean peninsula.

We would like also to convey our appreciation for the work carried out by ODIHR in assisting participating States in implementing their gender-related commitments, including on prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. These activities should continue, also in light of the new commitments on the matter adopted last December in Milan. Furthermore, we commend all efforts to mainstream gender through all ODIHR's activity, as a tool to increase effectiveness, and we commend you for the achievements in this regard, some just mentioned by you – for instance with regard to election observation, and even more across the entire spectrum of activities as shown in the annual report.

We also appreciate the work of ODIHR when it comes to organising the Human Dimension events, an opportunity for all of us to engage meaningfully with civil society. As all participating States declared in Astana 2010, we value the important role played by civil society in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law. The open and inclusive character of these events needs to be maintained, as set out in our joint commitments. With regard to the Human Dimension events in 2019, we will engage constructively in the negotiations on the consensus-based events and we fully support the Slovak Chairmanship in its efforts to timely adopt the needed Decisions. This would allow ODIHR to start the preparations in time, thus enhancing the participation in the events, including from civil society, and ensuring good quality discussions. We welcome the introduction by ODIHR in 2018 of a new, online registration system for Human Dimension events which has contributed to better preparation of the meetings.

In conclusion, we would like to stress once again the crucial role ODIHR plays in fulfilling the core tasks of the OSCE. We believe that ODIHR must be sufficiently staffed and resourced to carry out its vital work. From our side, let me assure you that we are making all the efforts to ensure that.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.