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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 11-22 September 2017

EU Statement - Opening Session

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the European Union at the opening session of the 2017 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The EU wishes first of all to congratulate Ms. Ingibjörg Gísladóttir, for her appointment as the new Director of ODIHR.

Director Gísladóttir, you can count on the support of the EU and its Member States, as we are convinced that, through its invaluable work, ODIHR as an autonomous institution, contributes to peace and stability throughout the OSCE area. We wish you all the best for your future work.

The EU furthermore expresses its sincere appreciation for the efforts of the Austrian Chairmanship-in-Office to build consensus for the agenda of the HDIM. Our gratitude goes also to ODIHR for the excellent preparation of this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

The struggle for the protection and promotion of human rights never ends. We support ODIHR's effort to defend human rights and assist participating States to implement the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. However, we note with regret that in parts of the OSCE area, the situation rather deteriorates than improves.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms, as provided for by international standards and OSCE commitments, are being denied or seriously hampered in many countries; the crackdown on human rights defenders, political dissent and civil society continues, while media outlets are shut



EUROPEAN UNION

down and journalists are arrested and imprisoned. Security reasons are often the excuse. The EU recalls that measures to combat terrorism or violent extremism must fully respect international human rights standards and fundamental freedoms. Combating and ultimately overcoming violent and unlawful behaviours will not succeed, if the means to do so are not in conformity with human rights standards. There can be no sustainable security without human rights.

Allow me now to refer to specific country situations.

In eastern Ukraine, the volatile security situation increases the already very high number of civilian casualties and causes considerable damage to critical infrastructure, thus adding even more pressure to a dire humanitarian situation.

The EU continues to urge all sides to ensure respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. We condemn the gross and systematic human rights violations committed by Russian backed separatists in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk Agreements and honour their commitments. We underline Russia's full responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to exert its influence over the separatists it backs to meet those commitments in full. We regret that commitments made, to ensure a lasting ceasefire, have not been respected so far.

The EU also calls for the unimpeded access of the OSCE and other international organisations to the whole territory of Ukraine, including to the Crimean Peninsula. The EU will continue to support the vital work of the OSCE and its Special Monitoring Mission, including through financial and material assistance. We deplore the tragic incident involving an SMM team on 23 April, which killed one SMM patrol member and injured two others. It is a stark reminder that all sides must fully guarantee the security and safety of the SMM monitors and ensure their full, free and unhindered access throughout the country, including to the Ukraine-Russia state border.



EUROPEAN UNION

We note the progress made so far by Ukraine in the implementation of its National Human Rights Strategy and the related Action Plan. We call on the Ukrainian Government to continue stepping up its efforts to implement the necessary reforms. We also stress the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach towards all its citizens.

We call on Russia to cease the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. We note with increasing concern the reports by the OHCHR on the violations of human rights and the precarious situation of persons belonging to national minorities in the peninsula, in particular the Crimean Tatars. The banning of their Mejlis and the ongoing persecution of their representatives constitute a grave attack on the rights of all Crimean Tatars. The harassment of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists complement the bleak picture of the human rights situation on the Peninsula. The EU continues its call for the full implementation of the 2016 UNGA resolution on the human rights situation in Crimea, including full cooperation with international human rights monitoring mechanisms.

The EU renews its call on Russia to free all Ukrainian citizens illegally detained, put on trial, or convicted in Russia and in the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula.

Furthermore, the EU continues to observe the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Russia, in particular through the implementation of the 'foreign agents' law, and the curtailing of rights and freedoms, in particular freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Recently adopted measures will limit internet freedom and increase the levels of censorship. The repression against the opposition has become even more evident since the large demonstrations of 26 March and 12 June. This is especially worrying in the context of the upcoming elections. Human dignity and the right to life are not respected in Chechnya, where, among other grave human rights violations, reported abductions, torture and killings of LGBTI persons are still to be thoroughly investigated. We urge the Russian authorities to fulfil their commitment to a full and thorough investigation, and hold those responsible to account. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned earlier this year on grounds of 'extremism', thus significantly limiting freedom of religion or belief. In short, the



EUROPEAN UNION

human rights situation continues to fall below Russia's OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations. We have expressed our concerns on these developments both publicly and in meetings with Russian officials.

On Georgia, we remain concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We call for access for international human rights monitoring mechanisms to these regions and underline Russia's responsibility in this regard.

On Azerbaijan, the EU remains worried about human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country including freedom of expression and the freedom of the media, which are fundamental elements of any democratic society. The EU reiterates its call to the Government to ensure their respect and to provide legal and financial space to its civil society, human rights defenders, journalists and political opponents and to guarantee rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. Whereas the EU welcomes amendments to the legislation for foreign donors to provide grants, steps should be taken to align the legislation with international and European standards. We also call on Azerbaijan to end politically motivated prosecutions, fully implement rulings of the European court of human rights and resume the encouraging developments seen last year with the release of several human rights defenders, journalists and activists.

We welcome the publication by the Government of Belarus of the inter agency action plan on human rights in October 2016, but call for more tangible progress in its implementation. Belarus should respect the rule of law and guarantee the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression and media freedom, which were seriously harmed by the Government's response to the peaceful demonstrations in February and March this year. The EU is concerned about the recent arrests of representatives of Belarusian trade unions, and will follow developments closely. We also again call upon the Government to start cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and to expand its cooperation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe.



EUROPEAN UNION

We continue to regret that Belarus, alongside the United States, remains one of only two OSCE States where the death penalty is still applied. We urge both to commute the remaining death sentences, to continue public debate and introduce without delay a moratorium as a first step towards its abolition.

The EU continues to follow closely the situation in countries in central Asia, which remains worrying. We regret the absence of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan at the meeting.

We reiterate our concerns about the shortcomings in human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkmenistan. While acknowledging the recent efforts in adopting a national action plan in the field of human rights and nominating the first ombudsperson, we underline that there is still a significant gap between the legislative framework and its practical implementation and call on Turkmenistan to further implement its OSCE commitments in the Human dimension. We hope that the new Human Rights Commissioner's office will carry out its mandate in an effective and independent way in line with the Paris Principles, and that the Ombudsperson will also have a role in monitoring detention facilities and making the results of its investigations public.

The EU welcomes also the ongoing process of reforms in Uzbekistan and its proactive outreach to international partners, illustrated by recent visits of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Secretary General and the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human rights (DROI). The EU notes some important steps taken by Uzbekistan in enhancing its cooperation with the OSCE, such as its renewed participation in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the visit of its President to Tashkent, the dialogue with ODIHR, as well as the recently issued standing invitation to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In Turkey, we have witnessed a worrying pattern of arbitrary imprisonments of a large number of members of the democratic opposition, journalists and human rights defenders, including EU citizens. With more than 150,000 former public servants dismissed since the July 2016 coup attempt, the right to swift and effective judicial review of these administrative decisions must be



EUROPEAN UNION

guaranteed. We have expressed to the Turkish Government our concerns that are fundamental to our relationship and the aspirations of the people of both Turkey and the EU: the rule of law, the right to a fair trial, the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, and good neighbourly relations are key principles that Turkey has committed to, not only as a candidate country but also as a member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman,

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are at the heart of the EU's external policy; the mid-term review of the ambitious and far-reaching EU Action Plan 2015-2019 on Human Rights and Democracy published in July bears witness to this.

However, we continue to be faced with a number of challenges in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms also within the EU. This is the case, for example, in the fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia and in the area of asylum and migration.

Migration and forced displacement remains a top priority for the EU. One year ago, we launched the Partnership Framework based on the conviction that managing migration requires partnership and a comprehensive approach, which includes the protection of the rights of migrants, the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking and the need to combat the root-causes, such as poverty, conflicts and climate change.

We have been working on a daily basis with several countries of origin and transit in Africa and beyond. This common work has already resulted in remarkable progress in the fight against smugglers and human trafficking. We will keep working to increase even further cooperation with our partners, to ensure that lives are saved, migrants are treated with dignity, victims are identified and protected, and to make sure that we eradicate together the business model of those who exploit human despair.



EUROPEAN UNION

At the global level, the EU is actively engaged and stands ready to work closely with all partners towards an ambitious outcome, connecting all aspects of migration and forced displacement in a balanced way within the ongoing UN process towards the Global Compacts for Refugees and on Migration. In this context, we consider the OSCE a valuable platform for dialogue and coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination.

Mr. Chairman,

We are looking forward to a constructive Meeting, which will provide a valuable exchange of information and best practices to all participating States. We also welcome and encourage the participation of civil society organisations from across the whole OSCE area. Because supporting and protecting civil society and human rights defenders remains a key priority for the EU.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA* and the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA align themselves with this statement.

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