



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 989
Vienna, 13 March 2014**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Director of
ODIHR, H.E. Ambassador Janez Lenarčič**

The European Union and its Member States welcome Ambassador Lenarčič to the Permanent Council. We appreciate this opportunity to hear from you before your tenure as Director of ODIHR concludes. It is also a timely moment to discuss ODIHR's current activities, in light of the immediate human rights, democracy and security challenges facing our region.

The full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. We attach the utmost importance to this dimension of the OSCE's work, and wish to underline our full support for the work of ODIHR in protecting and promoting human rights across our region. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, free and fair elections, the inclusion of all within society are, more than ever, matters of legitimate and immediate concern. With its mandate to assist in the implementation of commitments in all of these areas, ODIHR's role will remain extremely important. ODIHR's strength lies in its expertise, professionalism and independence, as well as in its ability to liaise with NGO's and civil society. It represents an enormous asset available to participating States as they implement their human dimension commitments, and we encourage all participating States to draw on this.

We will continue to work constructively with all partners who wish to defend and advance the OSCE's human dimension. We take on these efforts with high priority, and against the backdrop of the worrying trend of human rights and fundamental freedoms increasingly being challenged in parts of our region. In this

context, we repeat our call that ODIHR must be enabled to fulfill its mandate and be provided with the necessary human and financial resources to do so.

ODIHR's projects for 2014 as described by Director Lenarčič this morning will contribute significantly to this goal. We look forward particularly to the follow-up on promoting freedom of religion or belief through the new guidelines as well as on improving the inclusion of Roma and Sinti as these two topics were highlighted during the last Ministerial Council. We also look forward to the launching of the guidelines on protection of human rights defenders, an area where the EU has been particularly active with the recent publication of its own guidelines. We would also be interested to know more about the on-going work of ODIHR on freedom of assembly, as well as the development of guidelines on freedom of association.

The situation in Ukraine underlines the need for a comprehensive approach to security. We express our strong support for ODIHR's planned activities and see them as an important contribution to broader efforts to resolve the crisis. These activities should be seen in conjunction with a range of other OSCE activities in Ukraine. We commend ODIHR for responding positively to requests by the Government of Ukraine. The circumstances on the ground are challenging and we express our appreciation for the efforts of ODIHR's excellent staff members and experts.

In particular, we thank ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities for having established a "Human Rights Assessment Mission to Ukraine". This assessment mission's report and its recommendations will play an important role in addressing violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It will also contribute to reconciliation, and to the prevention of further conflict. It has our full support, and several EU Member States are providing funding for the mission. It is crucial, that the mission enjoys full and unimpeded access across Ukraine and the full cooperation of everyone.

Furthermore, we welcome the deployment of an ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Ukraine to observe the Presidential Elections in May. This is another

area where ODIHR has a crucial role to play. We are ready to support ODIHR's Election Observation Mission through financial contributions and the seconding of Long and Short Term Observers.

We welcome ODIHR's fruitful dialogue with the OSCE's Partners for Cooperation and we invite the Director to update OSCE participating States on activities that are being planned as part of this dialogue. We welcome the expertise ODIHR provided in Tunisia and support the preparatory work of ODIHR's Election Support Team for the upcoming Presidential Elections in Afghanistan.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to you, Ambassador Lenarčič, for your six years of dedicated work as the Director of ODIHR. We want to commend you for your excellent stewardship of this institution. You have discharged your responsibilities with outstanding professionalism and integrity in an independent and impartial manner. We, and this Organisation, are indebted to you for your service. We thank you again for your substantial and valuable contribution to the work of our Organisation, and wish you every success in your future endeavours.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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