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# OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 10 - 21 September 2018

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## EU statement - Opening Session

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Madam Chairperson,

It is my true honour to speak on behalf of the European Union at this opening session of the 2018 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

The European Union would also like to thank the Italian Chairmanship and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for their thorough work in organizing and preparing this meeting. In particular, in response to the Italian Ambassador's introductory remarks, we would like to warmly thank the Italian Chairmanship for its leadership and tireless efforts to have this meeting take place.

Madam Chairperson,

Year by year we are facing increasing challenges in organising the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the most important event in the OSCE Human Dimension. We have all committed to it and we should all honour this commitment.

We hope all participating States will make use of this meeting for an open and franc dialogue with each other as well as with members of civil society. We believe civil society is an essential partner for the implementation of the Human Dimension commitments. Safeguarding the open character of the OSCE in relation to civil society organizations is therefore of key importance to the EU.

We continue to be concerned about the ongoing or even increasing restrictions on civil society, crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms, growing pressure on human rights defenders, intimidation, attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors, as well as increasing intolerance in many parts of the OSCE region. These worrying trends represent serious challenges to our comprehensive security, including human security.



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Strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights, civil society, the rule of law and international cooperation is the best investment we can make for the long term comprehensive security of our societies. In this respect, the EU strongly supports the work of ODIHR in defending human rights and assisting in the implementation of our commitments. We must ensure that all OSCE autonomous institutions remain able to play their indispensable role in the implementation of commitments across the OSCE region.

Allow me now to refer to specific country situations.

We have expressed our grave concerns about the continuing application of the death penalty in the OSCE participating states that are still exercising it, and we urge the remaining countries maintaining the capital punishment to introduce a moratorium as a first step towards its abolition. The EU considers it a cruel and inhuman punishment and opposes the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances.

We remain deeply concerned about the dire situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol since its illegal annexation by Russia. This includes the precarious situation of persons belonging to national minorities on the peninsula, in particular the Crimean Tatar community, which faces systematic persecution. The humanitarian cost also continues to mount in areas held by Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The EU reiterates its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence. We remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk Agreements in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We underline Russia's responsibility in this regard and yet again call on Russia to exert influence over the armed formations it backs to meet those commitments in full.

We furthermore call on those in effective control to re-establish full access of all humanitarian organisations to the non-government controlled areas and to allow smooth and speedy delivery of humanitarian assistance. We repeat our call on Russia to free all Ukrainian citizens, illegally detained, put on trial, or convicted in Russia or the Crimean Peninsula, including Oleg Sentsov.



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The EU remains concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Russia, the curtailing of rights and freedoms, the repression against opposition and the shrinking space for independent media. We have joined the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media's call on the Russian Federation on a number of issues in the past year, from safety of journalists to legislative changes and judicial measures threatening freedom of expression online. We have noted with concern that the increasing restrictions on free speech are mirrored by persistent Russian use of disinformation as a destabilising tool. The EU also raised its concerns regarding violations of freedom of religion or belief, in particular the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses after having banned them on grounds of so-called extremism.

We have repeatedly expressed concerns about the arrests, attacks, intimidations and discrediting of human rights defenders and journalists working in the Chechen Republic. We are following closely the cases of Oyub Titiev and Yuri Dmitriev, calling on Russia to ensure full respect for their human rights and to release them immediately. Our concerns about reports of arrests, unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture, and killings of people in Chechnya based on their actual or alleged sexual orientation remained unanswered. The human rights situation continues to fall below Russia's OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations.

The EU continues to follow with great concern the deeply worrying backsliding in Turkey with regards to human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. More than 150 journalists are still in jail, while other journalists have received heavy sentences. We have repeatedly called on Turkey to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights and respect the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. The EU will continue to follow on-going procedures against journalists and other media actors, as well as human rights defenders, academics, writers, members of the opposition, parliamentarians and others. The EU expects that Turkey refrains from adopting any new legislative proposals or restrictive measures that would invalidate any positive effect of the termination of the state of emergency.

We have expressed our concerns about the human rights situation and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan. The recent decision by the Sheki Appeal Court of Azerbaijan to conditionally release opposition politician Ilgar Mammadov after over five years in prison was a



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welcome step. We expect the unconditional release and rehabilitation of all those currently imprisoned or under restriction of movement in Azerbaijan on political grounds, alongside the full implementation of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

We reiterate our concern about continued pressure put on bloggers and media workers in Azerbaijan. We share RFoM's concerns regarding the prison sentence against journalist Afgan Mukhtarli, and reiterate our call on Azerbaijan to release him immediately, as well as all bloggers and journalists prosecuted for carrying out their work.

The EU has joined the RFoM in expressing concern over some recent cases in Central Asia with regard to freedom of the media, while also noting some positive developments. We remain concerned about severe restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as attempts by the authorities to control civil society.

The EU also underlines the need to improve the human rights situation in participating States where protracted conflicts are persisting. It is important to recognise that it is the obligation not only of States, but also of non-state actors and those in control to ensure respect for international human rights law and to guarantee and protect the human rights of all people.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ongoing violations of freedom of movement, including the continuing "borderization" process and closures of crossing points, the restrictions of property rights and education in native language as well as severe obstacles to the rights of displaced persons are areas of particular concern. The European Union renews its call to the Russian Federation to reverse these trends.

Also within the EU we are facing challenges in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The fight against discrimination and providing protection to refugees and asylum-seekers are continuous priorities for the EU. We were all shocked by the recent murders of journalists in EU Member States which reminded us how important it is to continue the fight for rule of law and fundamental rights also within our own courtyard.



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Madam Chairperson,

We are looking forward to a constructive meeting, engaging with representatives of all participating States and civil society in looking at our OSCE commitments and exchanging information and best practices.

Thank you.

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

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