

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1044
Vienna, 12 March 2015**

**EU statement in response to the Belgian Deputy Prime
Minister, H.E. Didier Reynders**

Mr Deputy Prime Minister,

It is a great pleasure for the European Union to welcome you in the Permanent Council of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We have listened with interest to your priorities and activities as Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and we thank you for your presentation.

Mr Chairman,

Deputy Prime Minister Reynders has shared with us a number of reflections on the context in which we work today. It is indeed important to keep reminding ourselves where we have come from in order to determine where we have to go.

European security has been jeopardised over the past year following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. The wider implications of Russia's violations of basic OSCE principles represent a significant challenge. It is important for the European Union, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, that has valuable expertise to offer, to achieve complementarity and synergy to avoid duplication in our continuing efforts to de-escalate the crisis and seek an urgently needed sustainable political solution. We reiterate that any solution must be based on respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. In this regard, we also reiterate our concern on the situation in Crimea. Disturbing reports indicate that several groups opposed to the annexation face severe pressure, including Crimean Tatars.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe share common values and principles. Belgium's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe provides an opportunity to build on existing efforts to strengthen the coherence and coordination of both organisations,

especially in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We appreciate the continuous dialogue and practical cooperation that takes place between our two organisations. We should reinforce these joint efforts, at the political and strategic level; between representatives of both organisations; as well as on the ground in countries where our organisations and the European Union are active in supporting progress and reform. We also particularly support the Belgian efforts in taking forward the ongoing reform of the Council of Europe in particular the attempts to further strengthen the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, promote the implementation of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and to make the Court more efficient.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe already cooperate in a number of areas. We very much value our close cooperation on human rights issues. We also welcome the joint work on combatting trafficking in human beings. We further welcome the close cooperation in the field of election observation and assistance. The partnerships involving OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission reinforce the individual work of our respective organisations. We also welcome the jointly prepared new guidelines by ODIHR and the Venice Commission on the Legal Personality of Religious and Belief Communities and on Freedom of Association.

One of the priorities of the EU in the Council of Europe is the fight against intolerance and hate speech. Today, more than ever, while standing up for freedom of expression, it is of utmost importance to actively combat hate speech that can lead to violent extremism and radicalisation. Recent terrorist attacks in our partner countries, as well as in Paris, Copenhagen, and last year in Brussels, have demonstrated that violent extremism is a global threat. Also within the OSCE we are determined to adopt a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism, while upholding human rights, including the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, and the rule of law. Cooperation between our institutions could enhance the discussion and positively contribute to tackling this issue. In this respect, the EU welcomes the Belgian initiative to organise on 8th of May a high level conference on 'Tolerance trumps hate' in Brussels, which could feed in the upcoming OSCE Security Days Conference.

We welcome the work of the Council of Europe on counter-terrorism, in particular the Action Plan on Terrorism, as well as on the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, and look forward to the Additional Protocol to the CoE Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, which is currently being negotiated. We see substantial scope for synergies between the OSCE and the Council of Europe in the field of radicalisation. A strong CoE participation in the upcoming OSCE counter-terrorism conference on countering the incitement of foreign terrorist fighters and preventing their recruitment and departure would be useful.

Regarding the fight against cyber-crime, the Council of Europe is clearly in the lead with its Budapest Convention, which we fully support. The OSCE, on the other hand, is very active in the field of cyber security, where a first set of Confidence-Building Measures has been adopted and is being implemented and where a second set of CBM's will hopefully be agreed this year.

We continue to believe that cooperation could be further pursued between the OSCE and the Council of Europe in other areas where joint work has already proven productive, including Freedom of Media, human rights education, improving the situation of Roma and Sinti, and combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We will continue to work to make better use of the comparative advantages for an improved efficiency of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe, whilst fully respecting mandates and avoiding duplication. In doing so, the European Union looks forward to continuing to work with the very able and dedicated Belgian team here in Vienna.

I would like to once again sincerely thank Minister Reynders for sharing his ideas on the OSCE and the Council of Europe and we wish him every success in the future.

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

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.