



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1073 Vienna, 29 October 2015

EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Director of ODIHR, Mr Michael Link

The European Union wishes to thank Director Link for his report to the Permanent Council on this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Critically reviewing the implementation of our shared commitments is an essential component of our dialogue in the OSCE and of the building of our security community. Human Dimension commitments are a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and are a cornerstone of our OSCE comprehensive security concept. The HDIM helps us identify how far we have come and what more needs to be done.

We noted that participation at this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, by both participating States and civil society alike, not only remained high but further increased. We commend the many participating States that continue to treat this meeting as an opportunity to engage meaningfully with civil society and the international community on issues of concern. Having been notably absent in recent years, we welcome the decision by Turkmenistan to send a delegation to participate in this year's meeting. We hope this engagement will be followed by further positive steps.

This year's meeting identified many areas where participating States are falling short of implementing their OSCE commitments. What is most concerning is the further regression in respect for certain human rights and fundamental freedoms that participants at this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting testified to. A clear theme running through this year's meeting was the shrinking space for independent civil society and human rights defenders in particular, in certain OSCE states. Countless speakers highlighted the use of new legislation to unduly restrict the freedoms of expression, association, assembly and of thought, conscience,

religion or belief to silence dissenting voices. State interference in the freedom of the media and the spreading of disinformation coupled with propaganda for war, harassment and violence against journalists, both offline and online, further curbs freedom of expression. Meantime, some states are abusing and undermining the rule of law to imprison those who speak out against such repressive measures. We call on those states pursuing such policies to desist and take proactive measures to reverse the restrictions that they have put in place. In this context, reports once again of the harassment of civil society participants who raised concerns at the meeting after they returned from Warsaw are particularly concerning.

We also cannot disregard an apparent tendency, on the part of some delegations, to instrumentalise NGOs. We believe this does not contribute to building trust and confidence or to creating common ground among participating States. The human rights violations in Eastern Ukraine and in Crimea were rightly again in focus at the meeting. We share the concerns expressed in the ODIHR/HCNM Human Rights Assessment Mission Report on the situation of human rights in Crimea after its illegal annexation by Russia and we call for the implementation of its recommendations, as well as for immediate and unrestricted access for the OSCE institutions to this region.

In our closing statement at this year's meeting we commented that the true test of participating States' willingness to uphold the OSCE commitments, and the strength of the OSCE security community, will be what participating States actually do to address shortcomings and violations. This year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting has only reaffirmed participating States' need for the valuable assistance which ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities offer. We call on all participating States to support, resource and engage fully and in good faith with the autonomous OSCE Institutions. For our part, we will continue to strongly support their mandates and their activities.

The Belgrade Ministerial Council also offers an opportunity for all participating States to send a clear signal concerning their determination to address some of the most concerning issues identified at this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. We hope that robust decisions can be agreed related to the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, torture prevention and gender equality, as

well as a clear declaration by participating States on their commitment to combating all forms of discrimination.

To conclude, we wish to express our sincere thanks to the organisers and hosts of this year's human dimension implementation meeting, ODIHR, the OSCE Serbian Chairmanship and Poland. We particularly wish to thank ODIHR for their determined efforts to facilitate increased civil society engagement, such as through livestreaming the sessions and the use of social media, within the current agreed framework for the meetings. We will continue to support all efforts aimed at strengthening this important meeting, hosted by Poland.

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, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA 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.