



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1159
Vienna, 5 October 2017**

**EU Statement in response to the Report by the Director of
the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
(ODIHR) on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

We welcome Director Gísladóttir to the Permanent Council and thank her for her first report on HDIM as the ODIHR Director. We also wish to thank the Director, her team and the Austrian Chairmanship for organizing the Meeting and Poland for hosting it.

This year's HDIM fulfilled expectations, both in terms of content and organization, even given the limited time for preparations.

HDIM - the most important event in the annual human dimension calendar - continues to be a key platform to take stock of the human rights situation in the OSCE area and for reviewing implementation of our commitments. A genuine dialogue between civil society and participating States is the essence of HDIM. We need to preserve this unique character of HDIM and should step up our efforts in further raising its profile, attracting independent voices and making our interactions as meaningful as possible. However, we note with concern that a number of supposed non-governmental organisations continued to use HDIM to promote a particular government view which risks diluting real debate on human rights.

We, the EU and its Member States, have carefully listened to concerns and recommendations directed at us. We remain committed to addressing the identified challenges, as we believe that only by working on our own shortcomings are we credible to others.

We remain firmly committed to the open and free participation of civil society in the human dimension meetings, as set out in our commitments. In times when the space for civil society, for independent voices, in many participating States is shrinking this is all the more necessary. Their participation is essential to the quality and integrity of our HDIM discussions. In view of concerns expressed by some delegations, we

supported the measures introduced by ODIHR and the Chairmanship to strike a balance between ensuring the open character of the human dimension events and the need to maintain security and order. Those measures did indeed contribute to a respectful and orderly conduct of HDIM 2017. We do, however, oppose any changes that would risk reducing civil society access and participation.

We regret that some participating States chose to leave or not to participate at all at the 2017 HDIM. We reiterate that by not participating at HDIM states miss a valuable opportunity for an open and frank dialogue with other participating states and civil society. We hope that their decision not to participate in HDIM 2017 is not a sign of a diminished will to engage in the Human Dimension and the OSCE. We welcome the increased engagement of others and hope that this engagement marks their renewed commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This year's discussions pointed to ongoing violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms across the OSCE region, testimonies of which were given by many courageous human rights defenders, often under risk of reprisals and persecution back home. Human rights defenders should not have to face any negative consequences for their participation in HDIM. We are deeply concerned over reports of harassments and detention of family members of civil society actors in connection to HDIM participation. Such practices are unacceptable.

We heard disturbing accounts of human rights violations in areas held by Russia backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. We repeat our grave concern over the ongoing persecution of persons belonging to national minorities in illegally annexed Crimea, particularly the Crimean Tatars, and of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists. We remain firm in our non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, which we have constantly repeated throughout the HDIM.

We were also seriously concerned to hear about the high number of arrests and imprisonments of journalists in Turkey and the significant restrictions imposed on civil society and human rights activists.

We remain concerned to hear about discrimination against ethnic Georgians in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and we reiterate our firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.

We call on all participating States to live up to their commitments and to reverse the existing violations. The EU attaches great importance to strengthening dialogue and cooperation regarding the implementation of human rights commitments with all participating States. We reaffirm our constant commitment to support and protect human rights defenders and we condemn all forms of harassment and silencing of independent voices.

Madam Director, in your opening remarks at HDIM you warned against the wide spreading of hate speech. We regret that some speakers resorted to discriminatory language that is in contradiction to the very values we stand for.

On a positive note, we heard many delegations' accounts of tangible outcomes of cooperation with the OSCE autonomous institutions, demonstrating their valuable role in supporting participating States in upholding their commitments. We encourage all participating States to strengthen their engagement with the OSCE autonomous institutions, as well as to resource them adequately to allow them to carry out their mandates.

The EU wishes to stress that we demonstrated flexibility to compromise with regard to the agenda of this year's HDIM and we note this without prejudice for the future.

In conclusion, this year's HDIM has shown yet again that the human dimension commitments are more relevant than ever. It has also provided us with valuable input and ideas, which we hope we will build upon in view of the approaching Vienna Ministerial Council.

We reiterate our strong support to the mandate and autonomy of ODIHR, the guardian of our commitments. We thank Director Gísladóttir and her staff for their work and highly commend them for the transparent and impartial manner in which ODIHR fulfills its mandate.

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.