



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1465 Vienna, 14 March 2024

EU Statement in response to the report of the ODIHR Director, Matteo Mecacci

1. We welcome ODIHR's Director, Mr. Matteo Mecacci, and thank him for the comprehensive report.
2. Director Mecacci, as you have rightly said, the past year has again been challenging both for human rights and democracy across the OSCE area, and for the OSCE itself. As Russia continues its unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, ODIHR's commitment to strengthen democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law, and promote human rights is needed more than ever. We also share your assessment that the repression and intensifying targeted campaigns of arrest and prosecution, as well as imprisonment of those expressing dissent, raise fears for the safety of those imprisoned and growing concerns for the democratic future of the Russian Federation. Similar concerns have been repeatedly voiced by the RFoM regarding the ongoing abuses targeting the safety of media actors, media freedom, and overall freedom of expression within the Russian Federation. We share ODIHR's grave concern regarding the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, including the continued arrests merely for participating in peaceful demonstrations, or interacting with social media content critical of the official line of the national authorities.
3. We wish to acknowledge Director Mecacci's strong and coherent public stances on Russia's war of aggression, democratic backsliding, and contraventions of OSCE

principles and commitments. No one should stay silent in the face of such challenges to our shared principles and commitments.

4. The European Union welcomes ODIHR's continued efforts in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms across the OSCE area, including regarding the humanitarian crisis affecting over 100.000 Karabakh Armenians last year that followed Azerbaijan's military operation on 19 and 20 September 2023 and the nine-month blockade of the Lachin corridor. Karabakh Armenians have the right to live in their homes in dignity, without intimidation and discrimination, and to a safe, dignified and sustainable return. The EU also welcomes ODIHR's tireless support for human rights defenders, as well as its work on torture prevention and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. We value the expert guidance that ODIHR has offered to participating States (pS) on ensuring the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening democratic institutions, increasing political participation of women and persons in vulnerable situations, such as Roma and Sinti, as well as on ensuring inclusive and diverse societies by promoting tolerance and combating all forms of discrimination, including by preventing and combating hate crimes and promoting gender equality. We thank ODIHR for the *Violence Against Women in Politics* Toolkit that offers valuable solutions on gender equality, as well as for the *4th Status Report of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*. The *Dublin Recommendations* adopted in connection with the annual meeting of the ODIHR Advisory Panel on the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities take forward an important area of ODIHR's work in supporting inclusive democratic institutions.
5. Deeply regretting that the Belarusian and Russian authorities did not invite an election observation mission by the OSCE/ODIHR, contrary to their international commitments, we commend ODIHR on its election observation efforts throughout 2023, with 18 election observation activities in 16 OSCE pS and 61 election-related reports published. In line with OSCE commitments, EU Member States have invited ODIHR for the upcoming June European Parliament elections. We reiterate our full support for ODIHR's comprehensive election observation methodology and thank you for the new *Handbooks on election administration* and on *women's electoral participation*. We also reiterate our expectation that the Azerbaijani authorities will

take on board and implement the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations regarding Azerbaijan's February early presidential elections, which took place within a restrictive political environment and under laws that curtail fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as recommendations of previous elections. We note with concern that the OSCE ODIHR/PA Election Observation Mission referred to a recent clampdown, numerous arrests and detentions of critical journalists, civil society representatives and members of non-parliamentary opposition parties taking place in recent months. Following the December 2023 early parliamentary elections and local elections in Serbia and in view of the upcoming new local elections, we expect OSCE/ODIHR recommendations regarding these and earlier elections to be implemented as a matter of priority. This includes addressing issues such as auditing the unified voter register and ensuring a level playing field for all candidates, particularly concerning media access and compliance with media legislation. We also expect that credible allegations of irregularities in previous elections are followed up in a transparent manner by the competent national authorities.

6. We express our thanks for ODIHR's readiness to provide technical and administrative assistance to the expert missions under the Moscow Mechanism, including the most recent one invoked on 29th February 2024. We look forward to the Mechanism establishing the facts and circumstances on possible contraventions of relevant OSCE commitments, violations and abuses of IHRL and violations of IHL, as well as possible cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity associated with or resulting from the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation. We also highly appreciate the Ukraine Human Rights Monitoring Initiative through which ODIHR monitors and documents violations of human rights and IHL resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We trust that these reports will feed into international accountability efforts. There will be no impunity: the perpetrators of any war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations must and will be held accountable according to international law.
7. We call on all pS to agree on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), as mandated by heads of state and government at the 1992 Helsinki Summit. We reject any suggestions to relocate the seat of ODIHR from Warsaw.

8. We highly value ODIHR's independent and professional expert guidance. We fully support the mandate of this autonomous institution, which is exercised in a transparent and impartial manner. We urge all pS to further strengthen their engagement with ODIHR in implementing human rights commitments, as a core component of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. In this context, we echo the ODIHR and RFoM in calling on Kyrgyzstan's Parliament to reconsider proceeding with the adoption of the so-called "foreign representatives" law. If adopted, the law would have an overwhelmingly negative impact on civil society, human rights defenders, and the media in Kyrgyzstan.
9. We call on all pS to ensure that ODIHR is adequately staffed and resourced in order to carry out its vital work in accordance with its mandate that was agreed by all pS. We will continue to firmly support ODIHR's activities, autonomy and mandate for the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the OSCE area.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.