



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1309 Vienna, 15 April 2021

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

The European Union welcomes Director Matteo Mecacci for the first time to the Permanent Council. We thank him for delivering the detailed report on ODIHR's work. We would like to take this opportunity to also thank Ms Ingibjörg Gísladóttir and Ms Katarzyna Gardapkhadze who both led the Office in the past challenging year.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has made protection of people's lives and health the top priority for all states. At the same time, this must not change our commitment to the values and principles we share. We have to make sure that the responses to the global crisis do not have negative repercussions on the enjoyment of human rights. Moreover, to be prepared and deal better with any future crisis, we must keep human rights at the heart of the recovery.

The State measures should be proportionate, temporary and in compliance with the rule of law, international obligations and OSCE commitments. They should not be used to restrict the work of human rights defenders, journalists, media actors and civil society organisations. They must remain subject to meaningful legislative and judicial oversight, including by parliaments, and be reviewed regularly to ensure they are still necessary, proportionate and adequate to address the threat that led to their introduction. In this regard we took note of ODIHR's report on Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic, which aimed to draw lessons from the pandemic in order to strengthen the institutions of all participating States in view of future challenges. We would be interested to know if you are planning any follow-up activities on that question.

The circumstances are indeed extraordinary. Nevertheless, we call on all participating States to strengthen their efforts towards a full implementation of their OSCE commitments and reversing existing violations. We remain gravely concerned about the dire human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol since its illegal annexation by Russia, which we condemn and will not recognize. We are also gravely concerned about the situation in Belarus. We repeat our call on Belarus to implement the Moscow Mechanism report recommendations and listen to the Belarusian people's call for organizing free and fair presidential elections based on international standards and fully respecting relevant OSCE commitments.

We welcome the Office's continued efforts to support the human rights defenders, as well as the continuing work on torture prevention and freedom of assembly and association. We value the expert guidance that ODIHR has continued to offer to the participating States on ensuring the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening democratic institutions, increasing the political participation of women, 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, promoting gender equality and combating gender-based violence.

ODIHR's work and its assistance to the participating States, as well as to the OSCE field missions remained vital despite the pandemic limitations. The Office skilfully and successfully managed the transition from in-person meetings, workshops and seminars to online activities. Nevertheless, we still see great merit in in-person encounters and hope that soon it will be possible to get back to them.

We greatly appreciate that despite challenging circumstances and scarce financial resources ODIHR was able to deploy 16 election observation missions in 2020. Let me also express our highest appreciation to monitors whose commitment in this challenging times made the EOMs possible. We also thank ODIHR for putting in place extra measures to protect their health. We reiterate our full support to ODIHR's internationally recognised election observation methodology. We also attach great importance to the recommendations emerging from the OSCE election observation missions, both inside and outside the EU, and remain committed to following-up on them, at the same time calling on other OSCE participating States to act likewise.

The Human Dimension events are a valuable opportunity for all of us to engage meaningfully with civil society. In 2020 HDIM did not take place due to the unprecedented, extraordinary and unpredictable circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We remain committed to engaging constructively in the discussions on how to set-up the HDIM 2021. We fully support the Swedish Chairpersonship in its efforts to timely adopt the Decisions on the consensus-based Human Dimension events in 2021.

This year marks 30 years since the OSCE participating States decided to establish the then Office for Free Elections in Warsaw. Ever since it has assisted the participating states in fulfilling their commitments in the Human Dimension. We would like to reiterate that in order to carry out its vital work ODIHR must be sufficiently staffed and resourced.

Let me finish by underlining our full support for the autonomy and mandate of ODIHR, which is exercised in a transparent and impartial manner. We thank ODIHR for supporting participating States in upholding their Human Dimension commitments, a core component of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. We wish you every success for the future.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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