



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1349 Vienna, 16 December 2021

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

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Director Matteo Mecacci and thanks him for the detailed report. We thank you for your professionalism, integrity and impartiality in fulfilling the mandate of ODIHR. We also thank the Swedish CiO, the ODIHR team and Poland for organizing the event marking the 30th anniversary of ODIHR, an important milestone for OSCE's human dimension.
2. For the past 30 years, ODIHR has played a fundamental role in preserving and strengthening democratic standards and institutions, and respecting human rights in the OSCE region. Originally established as "The Office for Democratic Elections", ODIHR is today the principal institution for ensuring support for free and fair elections, having deployed over 400 election observation missions across the OSCE region. We take this opportunity to express our full support for the election monitoring carried out by the OSCE/ODIHR as a valuable tool for the promotion of democratization and respect for human rights across our region.
3. 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 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. Gender-based violence, including online-based violence, has

been on the rise during the Covid-19 pandemic. We therefore highly appreciated Human Dimension Seminar on *Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls*, arranged by ODIHR last month.

4. The Human Dimension events are a valuable opportunity for all of us to engage meaningfully with civil society. We regret that, despite several months of intensive negotiations, one participating State was not able to join consensus on holding HDIM, the principal human rights event in the OSCE region. We underline the importance of ODIHR's role in securing a platform for civil society representatives and human rights defenders to interact with national authorities, ensuring their voices are heard. We will continue to call on participating States to live up to their international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments, as well as to speak up against the shrinking space, intimidation and reprisals against civil society and human rights defenders. We encourage all participating States to further strengthen their engagement with ODIHR as an invaluable source of guidance and support in implementing our commitments.
5. Against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, protection of people's lives and health is still at the centre of governments' priorities. We reiterate that the measures to combat COVID-19 and its consequences must be appropriate, proportionate, temporary, and in accordance with established human rights principles and commitments. The rule of law must be respected, and the preservation of human rights must remain at the heart of fighting the pandemic.
6. We highly value the independent expert guidance that ODIHR has been providing us with throughout the past 30 years, and we look forward to working closely with the Office in the future. In doing so, we reiterate that ODIHR must be sufficiently staffed and resourced to carry out its vital work according to its mandate, and we call on all participating States to ensure that the Office receives the necessary resources.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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