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**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1178
Vienna, 8 March 2018**

**EU Statement in response to the report of ODIHR Director,
Ingibjörg Gísladóttir**

The European Union warmly welcomes Director Ingibjörg Gísladóttir to the Permanent Council and we thank her for the detailed report.

We thank you for your professionalism, integrity and impartiality in fulfilling the mandate of this autonomous institution. Our appreciation goes also to the entire staff of ODIHR for their dedicated service to this organisation and to the participating States.

The work of ODIHR lies at the very heart of OSCE business. Full respect for democratic principles, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential for our common security in Europe.

On numerous occasions, we voiced our concerns related to worrying developments that restrict human rights and fundamental freedoms in many parts of the OSCE area. We see many of our concerns also reflected in your report: a hostile and risky environment for human rights defenders including the use of new legislation to unduly restrict the freedoms of expression, association, assembly and of thought, conscience, religion or belief, as well as to silence dissenting voices, thus limiting their ability to freely carry out human rights work; abusing and undermining of the rule of law to imprison those who speak out against repressive measures; persistence of death penalty, as well as of practices of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or punishment.

These days we are marking four years since Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, a violation of international law which we do not recognise and continue to condemn. As we stated in our statement in the Permanent Council last week, we remain gravely concerned

about the human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula. We therefore encourage ODIHR to closely follow and report on this issue and we call on all relevant actors to follow up on the recommendations of 2015 ODIHR/HCNM report, including by ensuring full and unimpeded access for ODIHR, other OSCE actors and other international organisations to the Crimean peninsula.

In view of these and other ongoing security threats and crises facing our region, our OSCE commitments have proven to be more relevant than ever. Human dimension commitments are a matter of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States, as agreed in Moscow in 1991 and reaffirmed at the Astana Summit in 2010, and are a cornerstone of our OSCE comprehensive security concept. Our commitments set out that it is the responsibility of participating States – the European Union Member States no less than others – to engage fully with ODIHR, without preconditions. We commend those participating States who actively seek ODIHR's assistance and engage constructively in response to recommendations ODIHR has provided.

We reiterate our full support to ODIHR's internationally recognised election observation methodology, encompassing both long-term and short-term observation. We 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. In this context, we stress once again that adequate funding and secondment of observers are essential for undertaking all election observation demands, be it expected or unexpected.

We welcome ODIHR's continued efforts to support human rights defenders and promote an enabling environment for their work, assist civil society organizations and the continuous advanced work on torture prevention. We value the expert guidance that ODIHR has continued to offer to participating States – on ensuring the rule of law, respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening political participation and democratic institutions, improving the situation and promoting participation of Roma and Sinti, in particular women and youth, and promoting tolerance and combating all forms of discrimination. We have constantly promoted an inclusive and comprehensive approach on combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination, based on the universality of human rights, and our OSCE commitments and we would like to see this approach fully reflected in ODIHR's work.. We share ODIHR's assessment on the need to enhance our response to hate crimes, and in this context the role of civil society is essential, alongside a

comprehensive criminal justice response. The ODIHR capacity building activities for civil society and the training for law enforcement and prosecutors are extremely relevant.

We value the work carried out by ODIHR in assisting participating States in implementing their gender-related commitments, including on prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. Furthermore, we commend all efforts to mainstream gender through all ODIHR's activity, as a tool to increase effectiveness.

We also appreciate the work of ODIHR when it comes to organising the Human Dimension events, an opportunity for all of us to engage meaningfully with civil society. The open and inclusive character of these events needs to be maintained. As all participating States declared in Astana 2010, we value the important role played by civil society in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law. We would like to remind that the responsibility for the timely adoption of the Decisions related to Human Dimension events lies with the participating States. We therefore plead for a swift adoption of the Draft Decision on the dates of HDIM, recently tabled by the Italian Chairmanship, in order to allow a good preparation of the meeting.

In conclusion, we would like to stress once again the crucial role ODIHR plays in fulfilling the core tasks of the OSCE. We believe that ODIHR must be sufficiently staffed and resourced to carry out its vital work. The limited number of funds allocated this year to ODIHR remains again highly inadequate given the current issues and challenges and threatens its programmatic activities. We thus regret that no consensus was reached among participating States to respond positively to ODIHR's proposal to increase its budget. Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* 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 the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA 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.