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OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2007

EU statement for the opening plenary session

**Opening statement by H.E. Mr. Manuel Lobo Antunes,
Secretary of State for European Affairs of Portugal**

24th September, Warsaw

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that on behalf of the European Union I address the opening session of 2007 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

I would first like to thank Undersecretary of State, Mr. Witold Waszczykowski, and the Government of Poland for once again hosting this meeting in the hospitable city of Warsaw, home of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Alberto Navarro González, Secretary of State for the European Union, representing the Spanish Chairman-in-Office Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, whose dedication to leading this Organization this year has been most remarkable. I would also like to make use of this opportunity to reiterate our support to the Spanish Chairmanship on the road to Madrid.

Let me also express our gratitude to ODIHR, Ambassador Christian Strohal and his team, not only for organizing this event, but also for its admirable work throughout the year in assisting the participating States in living up to their human dimension commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

Ever since the Helsinki Final Act, the then Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe, today Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, has made a decisive contribution to the stability and security of Europe. The respect and promotion of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, good governance and rule of law are core principles of the OSCE human dimension and cornerstones of stability and security in Europe and beyond. We must continue to strive to guarantee the implementation of the human dimension commitments we have undertaken, to draw attention to shortcomings in their implementation and, if need be, to stand ready to further develop our common OSCE *acquis*.

At the Helsinki CSCE Summit in 1992, the participating States unconditionally and unequivocally declared that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.

The European Union firmly believes that it is each and every one of the 56 OSCE participating States' right and duty to hold each other accountable to the commitments undertaken in the human dimension. As in previous years, the European Union will not refrain from drawing attention to situations where it considers participating States have failed to live up to their commitments in respecting democratic values and in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Similarly, where progress has been made, the EU will offer praise, as well as encouragement and further assistance, if so requested. It is with this spirit that the European Union will actively participate in the forthcoming discussions in Warsaw during the next two weeks.

Indeed, no country represented in this meeting, including my own and EU partners, holds a perfect record in terms of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this context, let me draw your attention to the recently created EU Fundamental Rights Agency. The Agency's main objective is to provide the relevant European institutions, authorities and member States when implementing the Community law with assistance and expertise relating to fundamental rights in order to further improve their respective track records. We will organize a side event tomorrow on the Agency's mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

The HDIM provides a unique opportunity for representatives of Governments, international organizations and civil society to share experiences, identify shortcomings and support progress in light of our human dimension commitments.

The European Union deeply regrets that its proposal to include a working session exclusively dedicated to Freedom of Association and Assembly was rejected by some participating States, even though these freedoms have been recognised in OSCE human dimension commitments and major international human rights instruments as cornerstones of a free and democratic society. We call on participating States to respect the principle that the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting should provide the opportunity to review the full range of OSCE commitments in the human dimension with adequate time.

The uniqueness of these Warsaw meetings lies mainly in the open and frank dialogue between Governments and civil society. The European Union welcomes and actively supports NGOs' participation in the HDIM and is delighted to see that, as in previous years, so many have freely registered to participate in the discussions.

Civil society plays a decisive role in guaranteeing the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Union applauds the dedication of NGOs and human rights defenders, sometimes under dire circumstances, to scrutinize their Governments' compliance with international human rights standards and come forward when violations are committed. In this respect, allow me to reiterate the EU's firm support to the adoption of an OSCE Ministerial Decision on human rights defenders.

Let me also draw your attention to a side event the EU will be organizing next week on the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, let me assure you that, over the next fortnight, the EU will actively participate in the discussions with a view to fostering the implementation of our common

commitments and thereby further contributing to consolidating the human dimension of security of the OSCE.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.