



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1394 Vienna, 14 October 2022

EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Mr. Valiant Richey

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and thanks him for his report.
2. This year, you are presenting your report to the Permanent Council against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. A war which has resulted in the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Millions of people in Ukraine have been forced to flee their country or have been internally displaced. We also remain concerned about reports of forced deportations of Ukrainian citizens to Russia or Russia-occupied territories in Ukraine, including through so-called "filtration camps", with no access to legal assistance or information. The ongoing war is also likely to increase the risks of trafficking in the longer term and will require our constant attention in order to monitor and mitigate such risks, be it for sexual, labour or other forms of exploitation.
3. In this respect, we commend the work of your Office in providing participating States with timely recommendations to mitigate the risk of human trafficking offline and online, stemming from the flow of refugees coming from Ukraine. These recommendations in line with other guidelines produced by regional and international actors, including the European Union, have proven useful in reinforcing protection and assistance to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. This shows the complementarity between anti-trafficking actions undertaken by organisations with different memberships and mandates, and the added value of working together towards the same goal. The launch of the #BeSafe campaign has further reinforced prevention by providing information to the at risk population.

4. EU Member States are welcoming and supporting an unprecedented number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine, most of whom are women and children. The EU Temporary Protection Directive, which was extended until 2024, as well as the Common Anti-Trafficking Plan developed under the lead of the EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims. The European Union and its Member States are providing those fleeing the war with food, shelter, access to health services, education and the labour market. Additionally, the EU Solidarity platform ensures the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive and coordination of operational responses, bringing together multiple stakeholders and providing a forum for discussion.
5. The EU is implementing the Common Anti-trafficking Plan, which includes key actions for the EU and its Agencies, as well as recommendations for the Member States around five priority areas: awareness raising; prevention; law enforcement and judicial response; assistance and support to victims; and cooperation with non-EU countries, particularly Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The immediate reaction and preventive measures contributed to the low number of confirmed cases. Combatting trafficking in human beings remains a key priority of the European Union. It is both a security issue and a violation of fundamental rights. In accordance with the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021 – 2025), the EU and its Member States are committed to working closely with international partners to promote compliance with the Palermo Protocol.
6. We agree with your assessment that more needs to be done to address human trafficking. Indeed, demand is the main driver, while technology acts as a facilitator of this crime. Without underestimating other forms of exploitation, we share your concern about the scale of online sexual exploitation and online child exploitation. In this respect, we commend your Office for the continuous efforts to remind States of the obligation to address the demand that fosters trafficking and for the publication of “Policy Responses To Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings”. In accordance with the EU Strategy, the European Commission is carrying out a dialogue with relevant internet platforms and technology companies in order to reduce the misuse of online platforms.

7. Furthermore, we agree that better protection for victims and criminal accountability for perpetrators are sorely needed. During this year's Alliance, it was highlighted that identification of victims of trafficking remains very low and, as a consequence, their access to protection and assistance is hindered. In this regard, we look forward to the upcoming paper on the "Social Path" of identification.
8. The EU has always been a staunch supporter of partnerships to ensure effective cooperation and coordination of efforts in the fight against trafficking in human beings. We therefore welcome your work with respect to cooperation with UN bodies and the Council of Europe, as well as with the OSCE Institutions and Field Missions. We encourage you to continue to focus on more elaborated and better-coordinated partnerships, including with the UNODC, in order to promote full implementation of the Palermo Convention and its two additional Protocols. The EU also attaches importance to cooperation with other international organisations and UN Agencies.
9. To conclude, we take a very positive view of your work and thank you for your efforts. It is essential to ensure a comprehensive approach when addressing trafficking in human beings, one that is human rights-based, victim-centred, gender-sensitive and age-specific. We look forward to continuing our co-operation with you and your team and wish you every success.

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

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