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## **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1348th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 December 2021

### **In response to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance and non-discrimination**

The European Union thanks the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for their participation in this Permanent Council meeting in spite of the constraints due to the ongoing pandemic.

Combating discrimination and all forms of intolerance is among the European Union's priorities, in both its internal policy and its external action, including its action at the OSCE. This strong and enduring commitment was confirmed two years ago through the adoption of the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action. Last year, the European Commission adopted the first EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, while this year it adopted the first EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life. It recently adopted the Gender Action Plan III (covering the years 2021–2025), the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the new EU Roma Strategic Framework.

All manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism, which we unfortunately continue to observe in the OSCE area, and all forms of discrimination based in particular on origins, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender are contrary to every human rights value – whether they occur online or offline.

Public authorities have a leading role to play in systematically and explicitly condemning any advocacy of hatred. Combating all forms and manifestations of racism and xenophobia requires, moreover, appropriate and effective legal responses but also preventive and educational measures promoting the values of tolerance, social inclusion and the equality of all before the law. The tools developed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in particular for training security forces and magistrates and for collecting data on hate crimes, are valuable means of assistance that we can draw on.

In that regard, we emphasize once again that to be effective, the work of the Personal Representatives must be complementary to, and take place in close co-operation with, that of the ODIHR under the aegis of the Chairmanship. We support co-ordination that is as close as possible among the three Personal Representatives so as to foster a universal approach to human rights. Accordingly, we welcome the conduct of joint visits by the three Personal Representatives to Finland and Uzbekistan this year and have complete confidence that the ensuing reports prepared by them will likewise be the fruit of joint efforts. This common approach is crucial to preserve the effectiveness and strength of our comprehensive approach to

combating all forms of discrimination while promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue in a spirit of openness and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, we would be in favour of enhancing the three Personal Representatives' efforts to foster inclusive dialogue and transparency regarding their work, but also gender mainstreaming of their activities, in line with the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality adopted in 2004. We underline the relevance, in every respect, of an intersectional approach when combating intolerance and discrimination.

At the OSCE level, the Copenhagen (1990) and Madrid (2007) commitments clearly set out our collective duty to combat all forms of discrimination, whatever they are based on. They recall the urgent need to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms apply universally to all human beings in law and in practice. In that regard, we are concerned about the risk of compartmentalization when combating religious intolerance in the OSCE, which could undermine the coherence of our commitments when it comes to addressing religious intolerance and the many forms of and grounds for discrimination.

We are deeply concerned by the rise in manifestations of intolerance and discrimination – online and offline – in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is necessary for the measures adopted in response to the crisis to take into account the needs of those who are most vulnerable to marginalization, stigmatization, xenophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination. It is for that reason that the European Union is committed to ensuring that its response to COVID-19 respects the dignity and human rights of everyone without any discrimination.

As tensions mount, recalling our common values and the common basis for combating all forms of intolerance – namely, affirmation of the equal dignity of human beings and rejection of intolerance towards others because they are different – is the best bulwark against the cycle of hatred. These values are at the heart of our OSCE commitments and should continue to guide us more than ever in our work.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, Serbia<sup>1</sup> and Albania<sup>1</sup>, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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