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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1295th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

10 December 2020

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 as a result of the current pandemic.

Combating discrimination and all forms of intolerance are among the European Union's priorities, in terms both of its internal policy and of its foreign and international co-operation policies, also at the OSCE. This strong commitment was confirmed last year through the adoption of the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action.

All manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism, which we are unfortunately seeing in the OSCE area, online or offline, 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.

Public authorities have a leading role to play in systematically condemning hate speech. Combating all forms and manifestations of racism and xenophobia requires effective legal responses but also preventive and educational measures promoting the values of tolerance, social inclusion and equality before the law of all members of society. Given our history, we, the OSCE participating States, have a duty to ensure that the diversity of the OSCE area remains a rich asset and not an instrument for social fragmentation and antagonism. The tools developed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in particular for training police officers and magistrates and for collecting data on hate crimes, are valuable levers to help us.

In that regard, we emphasize once again that to be effective, the work of Personal Representatives must complement and be closely co-ordinated with that of the ODIHR under the aegis of the Chairmanship. We would recall that reports should be distributed sufficiently in advance so that they can be usefully discussed in the Permanent Council. Equally, we would like to see the Personal Representatives co-ordinating as closely as possible among themselves so as to facilitate a universal approach to human rights. The long-term planning of their activities, country visits and the subsequent reports should be the result of joint efforts. It is important not to further compartmentalize our work so as to maintain the effectiveness and rigour in our comprehensive approach to the fight against all forms of discrimination, while promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue in a spirit of openness and mutual understanding. We recognize the extent of the challenges facing the three Personal Representatives as a result of the

COVID-19 pandemic. Given the importance of their work, we would welcome the intensification of efforts to promote inclusive dialogue and transparency in their activities.

Within the OSCE, the commitments undertaken in Copenhagen in 1990, the 30th anniversary of which is being commemorated this year, but also in Madrid in 2007 clearly set forth the obligations of States in combating all forms of discrimination, on whatever grounds. 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 that the compartmentalization of the fight against religious intolerance in the OSCE could be detrimental to the coherence of our commitments in dealing with religious intolerance and the many forms of discrimination and grounds for it.

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

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Iceland, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Andorra, align themselves with this statement.

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