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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1314th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

20 May 2021

On the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

On 17 May, we celebrated the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. The European Union pays tribute on this occasion to human diversity in all its richness, and to the right of every individual to be proud of who he or she is, to define his or her own identity and to love the person of his or her choice. It condemns all discrimination and harassment and all forms of violence, particularly the most extreme forms such as murder and acts of torture, committed on the grounds of a person's real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

As the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, stressed on 17 May, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to even higher levels of violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, including domestic violence, hate speech online and offline, and hate crimes. The crisis has led to a restriction of access to health services and has intensified socio-economic inequalities and stigmatization. Moreover, the pandemic has led to shrinking civic space and an increase in arbitrary arrests and detentions, physical attacks and psychological trauma for human rights defenders protecting the rights of LGBTI persons. These acts are unacceptable and the European Union stresses the importance of ending their impunity. The theme chosen this year for this International Day, "Together: Resisting, supporting, healing!", is most relevant.

The European Union remains concerned that sexual orientation and gender identity are still used to justify serious violations of human rights throughout the world. At Madrid in 2007, all the OSCE participating States reiterated their commitment to "effectively combat all forms of discrimination". Yet, in the OSCE area, LGBTI persons continue to be victims of discrimination or acts of hatred and violence on account of their real or presumed sexual orientation or gender identity. Same-sex sexual relations are still criminalized in some OSCE participating States.

As long as such acts of discrimination and violence persist, the European Union will continue to condemn them while actively working to put an end to them. It is in this spirit that the European Commission last year adopted its first ever LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, covering the period 2020–2025, which seeks to tackle discrimination, build inclusive societies, and ensure the safety and promote the rights of LGBTIQ persons around the world.

We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Chechnya, where crimes committed against LGBTI persons are a flagrant violation of Russia's international commitments. We once again urge the Russian authorities to conduct a prompt, transparent and thorough investigation into all of these acts and to

ensure that those responsible are brought to justice in accordance with the recommendations of the report prepared in 2018 under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism.

The struggle for the respect of human rights could not take place without the courageous commitment of human rights defenders, activists, journalists and other media actors, and civil society organizations working to defend the rights of LGBTI persons. We welcome the contribution of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in supporting civil society organizations working to promote mutual respect and to combat intolerance and discrimination, including hate crimes. We encourage the ODIHR, the other autonomous institutions, the field operations and the Secretariat to step up their co-operation in this regard and to intensify their relations with civil society organizations. It is our shared responsibility to create the conditions for safer and more tolerant societies as part of our comprehensive approach to security.

In closing, we reiterate our commitment to the promotion and defence of the universality of human rights and emphatically reaffirm that LGBTI persons have the same rights as all other individuals and these rights cannot be denied.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹ and Albania¹, as well as Ukraine, Georgia and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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