

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council N° 1188****Vienna, 7 June 2018**

EU Statement in response to the report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Amb. Lamberto Zannier

The European Union warmly welcomes the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his comprehensive presentation. We commend the High Commissioner and his team for the continued excellent work.

The European Union strongly believes that protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, is crucial for maintaining regional peace and stability. The EU remains committed to ensuring the rights already exercised by persons belonging to national minorities, as enshrined in UN, Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols and OSCE commitments, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities are an important aspect of our co-operation with all our partner countries, including our closest neighbours, and are consistently raised in our political and human rights dialogues. Within the EU, Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination on any ground including against persons belonging to national minorities. This protection is bolstered by EU directives tackling discrimination. We reiterate that persons belonging to national minorities should be able to exercise fully and effectively their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination and in full equality before the law. We reiterate the importance of an effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to national minorities and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout the territory of pS.

The mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities is of utmost importance for the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. This autonomous institution is and should remain a core conflict prevention instrument for the whole

OSCE area in providing early warning and seeking early action with regard to tensions involving national minorities.

We reiterate that co-operation of all participating States is necessary to enable the High Commissioner to fulfil his mandate. We therefore call on all participating States to meet their OSCE commitments to fully co-operate with the High Commissioner. We deeply regret that there are regions of the OSCE where the vital work of the HCNM continues to be obstructed. We commend those countries who are responsibly engaging in dialogue with the High Commissioner and call on others to follow these examples.

We support the HCNM's active engagement throughout the OSCE region, aimed at providing early warning and early action in order to prevent tensions involving national minority issues from turning into conflict and dealing with issues related to national minorities in inter-state relations. In addition, we commend the efforts to improve sustainable integration of diverse and multiethnic societies. We welcome the HCNM's continued engagement with regard to language and education issues as well as dialogue facilitation.

We note with concern the High Commissioner's observation that "state and non-state actors alike attempt to use language and education issues to fan the flames of conflict. There have been disputes over the use of language, and there have been reactions, sometimes rather harsh ones, involving legislation and the restriction of existing practices, in response to this". We commend the HCNM for providing a neutral platform for dialogue, in order to find a way out of the deadlock.

We welcome the High Commissioner's continued focus on thematic work. We encourage pS to make full use of the rich body of advice thematic guidelines provide. In this regard, we appreciate the HCNM efforts to ensure that the current guidelines continue to be relevant, up-to-date, better known and actively used by governments as guiding principles. We look forward to the event in Udine in July to mark the 10th anniversary of the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations. These recommendations continue to be of key relevance in our region and deserve to be continuously highlighted. We commend the HCNM on the event to mark the 20th anniversary of the Oslo Recommendations last week, and would welcome additional information and follow up. We would be also interested in hearing how you plan to follow up on geographical reports issued during the last years.

We appreciate the HCNM's continued close cooperation with other relevant structures of the OSCE as well as with other relevant international and regional institutions, in particular the Council of Europe and the European Union. With regard to cooperation with OSCE institutions and structures we would welcome your views on how to enhance the existing synergies and avoid overlaps, for instance as regards Roma and Sinti issues. Furthermore, we would appreciate your ideas on how to ensure better implementation of the opinions of the Venice Commission.

We once again express our full support for the office, mandate and autonomy of the High Commissioner and we reiterate the importance we attach to the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

We look forward to continuing the co-operation with the High Commissioner and wish him all the best in his endeavours.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.