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**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1219
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**EU Statement on the Occasion of International Women's
Day**

The EU and its Member States would like to thank both speakers for their interventions, marking the International Women's Day.

On 8th March we celebrate the achievements in overcoming barriers to gender equality around the world. We also come together on this day to look at addressing those barriers that continue to persist. It is in all our interests that we attain this goal. The EU and its Member States have been committed to gender equality as a fundamental right since 1957. We have come a long way since then, but, needless to say, there is still a long way to go.

We should also be clear from the outset: International Women's Day is more than just a day. Gender equality needs to be a part of all that we do every day.

Women are a key driving force against poverty, powerful agents of change and for the promotion of peace and security. Estimates of the value that women can add to the global economy, as entrepreneurs, investors and business leaders, run into trillions of Euros. In this respect, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a comprehensive recent blueprint for realising gender equality. We must collectively ensure its full implementation and ensure that no one, including no woman or girl, is left behind.

In our work at the OSCE, the message of International Women's Day resonates on many levels. This includes the essential role of women at all levels of decision-making, including in the security sector where we need to increase the number of women mediating and meaningfully participating in peace processes, and to enhance our implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent related Resolutions. The

message also resonates in the paramount role that women play in the environmental, economic and human rights' spheres.

Empowering women includes quality, inclusive, affordable and accessible education for all women and girls; it includes freedom from all forms of violence, including gender-based violence; it includes freedom from discrimination; and an end to negative attitudes, behaviours, and gender stereotyping.

As such, we would like to recall the EU's long lasting commitment to fight violence against women, which was in particular translated in 2017 when the Council of the European Union adopted its decision to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (Istanbul Convention).

In this respect, we welcome that the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls remains high on the OSCE agenda. We welcome the OSCE-led survey "Well-being and Safety of Women Survey", and we encourage all participating States to follow-up on its recommendations. Comprehensive data on women's and girls' experiences of violence are essential for the development and monitoring of legislation and policies to combat all forms of violence against women and girls.

We welcome the adoption of the Ministerial Council Decisions in 2018 on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women, and on Safety of Journalists which acknowledged that female journalists face distinct risks. Protecting them, and enabling them to do their jobs free of threats and attacks, is a clear message from this Decision. Both of these Decisions are important commitments by OSCE participating States that move us forward in our goal of protecting and empowering women and girls to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from realising their true potential. We regret that the Ministerial Council Draft Decision on Advancing Women's Participation in Political and Public life could not be adopted in Milan and we see merit in continuing last year discussions aimed at enabling full, equal and effective participation of all women in the society.

In this respect, we underline the need to increase implementation of all our commitments, including those from the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, and to address the gaps and new and emerging trends.

We welcome the MenEngage initiative at the OSCE which aims to raise awareness of the role that men and boys should play in promoting gender equality, eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls. We welcome that the Milan Decision on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women recognises the role played by men and boys in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and violence and in raising awareness about the impact of negative attitudes, behaviours, and gender stereotypes, recognizing also the efforts of the MenEngage initiative.

We encourage the cooperation among civil society organizations, participating States and international organizations aimed at further increasing synergies and stepping up efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.

Maintaining and enhancing our focus on gender mainstreaming within our Organisation remains an essential step. Let me conclude by saying that gender mainstreaming doesn't mean just counting women but making women count in all spheres of life, including in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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