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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1075th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

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In response to the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination

We thank the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for their statements. The European Union is firmly committed to combating all forms of discrimination, on whatever grounds. All manifestations of intolerance that we unfortunately observe every day in the OSCE area, be they racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, anti-Christian, homophobic or against Roma or migrants, are contrary to all human rights values and are sources of conflict.

The public authorities have a most important role in systematically condemning hate speech. Too often, words by leaders heighten tensions as they speak of the risks posed by one or other category of persons on account of their difference, be it in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion, race or sexual orientation. In view of our history, we, the OSCE participating States, have a duty to ensure that the diversity of our region remains a rich asset and not an instrument for conflict.

As the High Representative Federica Mogherini stated on behalf of the European Union on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March this year: “Vigorous measures for preventing and combating all forms and manifestations of racism, and xenophobia are indispensable for the building of safe, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the values of diversity, tolerance and mutual respect. These shall include not only effective legal responses, but also preventive measures that promote social inclusion and equality of all members of society.”

Within the OSCE, the commitments undertaken in Copenhagen (1990) and Madrid (2007) clearly state the responsibility of States to combat all forms of discrimination, on whatever grounds. They recall the urgent necessity to ensure that fundamental rights and freedoms apply universally to all human beings, both before the law and in practice. The tools developed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, including the training of police and magistrates and the collection of data on hate crimes, are valuable levers for assisting States.

The European Union has a solid legal apparatus in full compliance with the OSCE’s commitments. Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination of any type. Several directives specify how Member States should respect this principle of

non-discrimination, within the life of society in particular, and combat all incitation to violence and hate. In that regard, human rights education at all ages is a powerful ally. Combating prejudices goes hand in hand with free access to information and freedom of expression. To sharpen their public response in fighting racism, Member States of the European Union can also rely on the work of the Agency for Fundamental Rights.

In conclusion, we should like to express our concern at the attempt to fragment the fight against intolerance within the OSCE and to weaken the coherence of our commitments by adopting a piecemeal approach. We see a risk of our commitments becoming focused on particular minorities and favouring the fight against certain types of discrimination to the detriment of others, with the negative effect that this could produce in terms of unhealthy competition between victims, confrontations between communities or the failure to take into account the multiple forms of discrimination or some of the reasons for it.

At a time of increased tensions, recalling our shared values and common basis in the fight against all forms of intolerance, namely the affirmation of the equal dignity of all human beings and opposition to intolerance of others because they are different, is the best defence against the spiral of hate. These values are at the heart of the OSCE's commitments and should continue more than ever to guide us in our work within the Organization.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,¹ Montenegro¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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