



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1381 Vienna, 7 July 2022

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for the comprehensive report.
2. The EU strongly believes that protection of human rights, including those 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 the applicable UN and Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols and in OSCE commitments on non-discrimination and respect for diversity.
3. Within the EU, 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. The rights of persons belonging to national minorities are an important aspect of our co-operation with all partner countries, including our neighbours, and are consistently raised in our political and human rights dialogues.
4. The EU adopted in March 2019 the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action. 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 the effective implementation of legislation on the protection of human rights, including those of persons belonging to national minorities, and their non-discriminatory treatment throughout the territory of participating States.

5. Conflict prevention and early warning are EU priorities. The mandate of the HCNM, providing early warning and seeking early action with regard to tensions involving persons belonging to national minorities, is of utmost importance for the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. We reiterate our full support for the mandate and autonomy of the HCNM and underline that co-operation of all participating States is necessary for the High Commissioner to fulfil his mandate.
6. Against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, an active engagement of HCNM in conflict prevention and early warning throughout the OSCE region is more important than ever. While acknowledging the importance of "silent diplomacy", we recall that different means might be more appropriate in some cases, depending on the specific situation.
7. We share the concern and condemn the fact that Russia misused minority issues to justify its aggression against Ukraine. We agree that such a deliberate misguided discourse of exploiting minority issues has the potential to harm reconciliation and recovery efforts in Ukraine. It also poses serious risks for the stability of the entire OSCE region. As you rightly point out, Russia is obligated by international law to observe human, including minority, rights in all territories temporarily under illegal Russian military control or in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations, including in Ukraine.
8. More generally, we commend the HCNM's efforts to improve sustainable integration of diverse and multiethnic societies, as well as political representation of persons belonging to national minorities. We welcome the HCNM's focus on effective implementation of legal frameworks on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, in line with international standards and commitments, as well as his continued engagement with regard to language and education issues, dialogue facilitation, effective participation in public affairs and property rights, access to media and the right to practice a religion in the mother tongue of persons

belonging to national minorities, where applicable. It is vital that the institutions representing persons belonging to national minorities function without undue political interference and pressure. We also welcome HCNM's fostering contacts among institutions with similar mandates within the OSCE region.

9. We appreciate your continued cooperation with other OSCE structures and relevant international and regional institutions, in particular the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe. We commend your engagement with the Venice Commission.
10. We commend the HCNM for devoting more attention to gender equality, and for taking a gender-sensitive approach in all activities. Women and girls belonging to national minorities have an increased risk of exposure to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and we need to do more to ensure their rights and participation. We welcome the fact that the research into the intersectionality between issues related to gender equality and national minorities is progressing, and look forward to hearing more about this as it evolves.
11. We also welcome your attention on youth, as young people are important partners in addressing the root causes of segregation and exclusion, which contribute to divisions in society, and ultimately to conflict.
12. We reiterate our support for the thematic work of HCNM, and efforts to promote implementation of thematic guidelines and recommendations. In this regard, we look forward to marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* on 6 September in Ljubljana, as well as the *Max van der Stoep Award* ceremony in November in The Hague.
13. We thank the High Commissioner and his able team for their tireless and much needed work, and wish them every success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* 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 UKRAINE, the

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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