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ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA, AT THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL
CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION AND
NON-DISCRIMINATION)**

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**Opening plenary session: Combating intolerance and discrimination in the
OSCE area. Implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments**

The fight against all forms of discrimination and the promotion of tolerance are priorities for the European Union, internally as much as in its external relations. These areas are vital in order to ensure the full respect of the inalienable principle that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. This principle, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, is one of the founding values of our organization. Its full realization, and that of fundamental freedoms, underpin security and co-operation in Europe. This High-Level Conference provides us with an opportunity to restate the importance of these commitments and to assess how they can best be implemented.

Whatever their causes, manifestations of intolerance and racism are sources of tension and instability. Given that the current economic crisis provides them with fertile ground, they must be tackled today with even greater perseverance and determination. Since the Astana Conference, the European Union has, unfortunately, not been spared these manifestations of hatred, whether in the form of anti-Semitism, violence against Muslims, Roma exclusion, the stigmatization of Christians, or that of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. It is necessary to combat these forms of violence by attacking their root causes with a view to prevention, but also by punishing their manifestations. This requires a comprehensive, inclusive approach based on education in tolerance and human rights, the fight against exclusion and discrimination, and access to legal recourse for victims.

The OSCE has adopted a broad set of commitments in this regard. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) provides invaluable support to participating States in their full application. We should particularly like to welcome the ODIHR's efforts in the area of training on hate crime and the annual publication of its report on the subject, which serves as an additional tool to guide national plans for combating discrimination.

Within the European Union, Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights forbids any form of discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, nationality, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Furthermore, three directives seek specifically to combat discrimination. The first forbids any form of discrimination based on race or ethnic origin in a set of areas (employment, social benefits, social security, including health care, access to goods and services, and access to education), while the second forbids discrimination in the workplace based on religion or belief, age, disability, or sexual orientation. A third directive relates to the fight against manifestations of racism through criminal law. The aim is to ensure that within the European Union, racism and xenophobia be punishable through effective, proportionate criminal sanctions that act as a deterrent. This directive also aims to improve and encourage judicial co-operation in this area. Implementing these directives requires a cross-ministerial approach both on national and Europe-wide levels.

In terms of external relations, the European Union also raises the issue of discrimination in dialogue with non-member States and it has included this dimension in its co-operation strategies. All partner States in European Union neighbourhood policy must commit to combat all forms of discrimination, religious intolerance, racism and xenophobia. The European Union also works closely with the United Nations and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our Organization, the OSCE, is rich in different forms of diversity: geographic, cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic. It is also, however, rich in terms of the common values to which it has expressed its dedication since the Helsinki Final Act.

The commitments that we adopted in Copenhagen in 1990 and in Madrid in 2007 are clear, explicit sources of reference on the importance of combating all forms of discrimination, whatever the underlying motives. They apply to all human beings, including LGBT individuals who are to this day all too often victims of violence and stigma within the OSCE, as we were once again reminded last December by non-governmental organizations in their recommendations to participating States at the Dublin Ministerial Council.

Respect and mutual understanding cannot be partially applied or only involve some of our citizens. Otherwise, they contradict their own aims or lead to new divisions within our societies. Cultural differences cannot be used to justify flouting human dignity. Freedom of religion and of conscience, freedom of association and of assembly, and freedom of expression apply to each and every individual without distinction. They cannot be subjected to restrictions other than those provided for under international law.

In conclusion, and to offer recommendations to the OSCE, the European Union, while recognizing the unique features of certain forms of discrimination and xenophobia, wishes to emphasize the importance of adopting a comprehensive, cross-cutting approach in the fight against intolerance and discrimination; one which applies to all areas and to all individuals. We must avoid destructive forms of stigma and divisions while improving the cohesiveness of our societies, based on the equal dignity of each human being. This comprehensive

approach will also allow the OSCE to better combat the many forms that discrimination can take, such as through events similar to that organized last year on Roma women.

The European Union remains prepared to play a full role in this endeavour.

The acceding country Croatia¹, the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Iceland² and Serbia¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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

2 Iceland continues to be a member of the European Free Trade Association.