



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1270 Vienna, 4 June 2020

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, back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his comprehensive statement.

The European Union 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, Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols and in OSCE commitments on non-discrimination and respect for diversity. 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 also 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. Also, 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 an 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.

We underline that conflict prevention and early warning continue to be among our top priorities. The mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, 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 to enable the High Commissioner to fulfil tasks within his mandate.

We support the HCNM's active engagement throughout the OSCE region. We commend the 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 reiterate the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach in all activities. Women and girls belonging to national minorities can be at increased risk of being exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and we need to do more to ensure their rights and participation. As you have pointed out before, this is a fundamental prerequisite for social cohesion and conflict prevention.

Further, we welcome the special attention you give to youth, as young people are important partners in addressing the root causes of segregation and exclusion, which often contribute to divisions in society, and ultimately conflict.

Over the last weeks and months, the COVID-19 crisis, resulting, inter alia, in lockdown measures and border closures, has put a strain on most regions of the

OSCE, particularly affecting vulnerable communities, including people belonging to national minorities, and within these groups, particularly women and girls. We welcome your pro-active response during this crisis, which, as you rightly point out, “may deepen existing divisions, creating an environment in which identity-related matters can be politicized or securitized”. We commend HCNM for issuing policy recommendations on *Streamlining diversity: COVID-19 measures that support social cohesion* in April, and look forward to upcoming events in cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly and OCEEA.

Moreover, we appreciate the HCNM’s continued close cooperation with other relevant structures and institutions of the OSCE as well as with other relevant international and regional institutions, in particular the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe. With regard to the latter, we commend your continuous engagement in order to ensure the implementation of the Venice Commission’s opinions. With regard to cooperation with the UN, we value your important work with regard to the issues of statelessness.

We look forward to continuing the co-operation with the High Commissioner and his excellent team and wish them every success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH 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, ARMENIA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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