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EU Statement, Working Session 5: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reaffirms its dedication to the promotion of dialog, mutual respect and understanding in the OSCE region. Much has been achieved thus far but there are still urgent issues to be addressed. It is only when people throughout the OSCE region learn to value diversity free of intolerance and exclusion, that a harmonious life can be possible.

The current economic crisis generates new challenges. Minorities and migrants are usually the first victims of economic turbulences as they often live in fragile regions and are affected by a higher rate of poverty. With this in mind we need to be aware of our obligation not only to protect persons belonging to minorities from the negative ramification of the economic crisis, but also to counteract against the attempts of blaming minorities and migrants for the current economic and social difficulties in our countries.

Postal address
Obere Donaustrasse 49-51
1020 Vienna, Austria

Visitor's address
Obere Donaustrasse 49-51
1020 Vienna, Austria

Telephone
+43 (0) 1 217 53 0

Fax
+43 (0) 1 217 53 380

E-mail: osse-del.wien@foreign.ministry.se
euoffice@osce.org

The EU notes with great concern the growing number of violent, hate motivated incidents in the OSCE region. It shows us that much remains to be done, nothing among our achievements should be taken for granted and that we need to continuously defend our common values and commitments. The EU will continue to insist on the need to uphold the human rights of all human beings at all times, regardless of sex, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity.

In this regard the invaluable role of dialogue and education, as a tool for integration and respect for diversity must not be forgotten.

Unsettled issues concerning ethnic and national minorities may often cause unsteadiness in entire regions, not just in particular counties. Hence, these are problems of immediate urgency and, as such, must be dealt with at once, at the core.

The EU is ever ready for mutual cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It is determined to assist the OSCE's strive towards creating interaction programs of an even wider scope in an attempt to reach the most in need. With incessant enthusiasm it supports mutual respect, understanding and dialog.

The EU reaffirms its appreciation for the invaluable work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek. We commend his efforts to reduce tension stemming from different minority issues and his dedication to foster dialog and co-operation between neighbouring states. We would like to emphasize the High Commissioner's recent efforts to promote the Bolzano/Bozen recommendation by regional consultations in

Slovenia and Estonia and by the upcoming regional round table on Central Asia in Berlin as well the organisation of the Ten-Year-Review of Lund Recommendation. The EU urges all OSCE states to continue to co-operate with the High Commissioner on matters related to national minorities and make use of his expertise and assistance.

The EU cannot overrate the work of ODIHR and OSCE field missions and the role OSCE institutions have played in resolving problems connected to thwarting and fighting aggressive nationalism, chauvinism and racism. Placing these issues high on the schedule of the OSCE's activities has brought us ever nearer to overcoming them. We must now concentrate on the implementation of our obligations and HDIM enables us to observe our progress.

We all endeavor to stop violent instances of chauvinism, nationalism and racism, yet we must be cautious not to limit the rights and freedoms of legitimate voices in society by means of unjust categorization.

Mr. Chairperson

The European Union will continue its attempts in playing a leading role in the promotion of non-discrimination and tolerance throughout the OSCE area. Nonetheless it supports both the OSCE and the Council of Europe efforts in this subject and embraces the existing partnership of the two organizations. In order to achieve much needed coherence international organizations ought to avoid duplication in their activities.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.