



EUROPEAN UNION

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**EU Statement in response to the State Secretary of the
German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth, Dr. Ralf Kleindiek**

The EU and its Member States wish to thank the Chairmanship-in-Office for highlighting the importance of International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8th. We would also like to thank the State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Dr. Ralf Kleindiek for interesting and timely remarks and for highlighting important issues and challenges.

Gender equality is something that we must take into account every day, not just on International Women's Day. The EU and its Member States have been committed to gender equality as a fundamental right since 1957. We have come a long way since then but needless to say, there is still a lot to be done.

The EU and its Member States work relentlessly to combat sexism, gender-based and sexual violence and remaining inequalities in employment, pay, pensions and decision-making with different actions. We remain committed to supporting efforts to promote gender equality within the OSCE and beyond. Unfortunately it remains far from being achieved. Women are still paid on average 16% less than men, women hold less company board positions, have lower employment, more care responsibilities and they experience more violence, both sexual and physical. There should be no place for this in our societies. Women's rights are fundamental to the success of any society.

We need to act to achieve concrete results so that women enjoy the same rights as men. This goes not just for the EU, but also beyond. When women and girls have equal access to the political decision-making arena, to education, and participate fully

in business and economic decision-making, they can be a key driving force against poverty and for the promotion of peace and security.

The new 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals include the commitment to advance gender equality and empower women and girls around the world. Planet 50-50 by 2030 is a realistic goal and we have at our disposal the tools to achieve it.

Violence against women and girls is also addressed in the 2030 agenda. We continue to be at the forefront of efforts to tackle violence against women and girls, to end Female Genital Mutilation and to combat Child, Early and Forced Marriage. We underline the importance of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: further signatories and ratifications would send a clear sign to the world of our commitment to ending violence against women. The OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/14 taken in Basel in December 2014 marks an important step to tackle the issue in the OSCE area.

Moreover, in times of conflict, there is documented evidence of sexual exploitation and abuse against women and girls, who also face the risk of sexual exploitation and violence by those sent to protect them. Prevention of sexual violence in conflicts is critical to peace, security and sustainable development of societies. If its consequences are not dealt with effectively, it hinders community reconciliation and social economic empowerment. We must also ensure that survivors receive the necessary support to recover and rebuild their lives and participate fully in society. Furthermore, although sexual violence predominantly affects women and girls, it is important to note that it affects men and boys as well. Male and female survivors of sexual violence must also be acknowledged and supported.

Men and boys need to be engaged too in efforts to achieve gender equality and we therefore welcome the establishment of an OSCE MenEngage Network. We call on participating States to engage with this important champion for men's engagement in promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women.

We should also further recognise the pivotal role that civil society, including women's rights organisations, play in changing social norms, attitudes and behaviour in the pursuit of equality between women and men.

The OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality adopted in 2004 highlights the importance of implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and related resolutions, which remain highly relevant. In light of current conflicts and large-scale refugee movements, UNSCR 1325 is even more important today. Women are killed, suffer from all kinds of violence and end up being victims of human trafficking. Women should be better protected in conflicts. Women's active participation and leadership is crucial in all parts of peace and security decision-making and action. We completely agree that UNSCR 1325 should be better implemented. This is why the position of EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 was created as part of the EU's commitments on the occasion of the High Level Review of UNSCR 1325 last October. We underscore the importance of implementing the commitments made on the occasion of the High Level Review.

The EU reiterates the need to further strengthen our OSCE commitments and the work of our organisation on gender equality. We firmly believe that the OSCE is well-positioned to make a unique contribution to promoting gender equality, particularly in promoting women's participation and preventing and combating gender-based violence. We regret that we were not able to achieve consensus in Belgrade on an Addendum to the OSCE Gender Action Plan containing strengthened OSCE commitments. We thank the Chairmanship for all its efforts to build consensus and remain ready to work towards consensus on this important initiative. At the same time, continued and enhanced implementation of OSCE commitments related to gender equality, including the 2004 Action Plan, should remain at the forefront of our efforts. In this regard, there is still lots of work to do. Finally, we would like to reiterate our support to an OSCE-wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF 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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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