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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1214th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

31 January 2019

On the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day

The European Union thanks Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni for his statement on behalf of the Italian Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Ambassador Sandro De Bernardin.

On the day after International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the EU joins all those throughout the world commemorating a crime without precedent in the history of humanity.

As the EU High Representative pointed in a statement, we remember those who were killed for the only crime of being born. We remember the systematic attempt by the Nazi regime and its allies to exterminate the Jewish people and other groups – based on their ethnicity, on their beliefs or on sexual orientations.

This day is about memory, and it is about action for our times. Remembrance is an individual and collective responsibility, particularly in times when anti-Semitism rises again, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories flourish again, and attacks against Jews and the memory of the Holocaust are way too common – inside and outside Europe. So, more than ever, we have the duty to remain vigilant against all forms of racism and discrimination, old and new, to react and to act.

The European Union has always been and stays engaged against any form of anti-Semitism, including attempts to condone, justify or trivialize the Holocaust. The modern project of European integration was born as a response to the Second World War and the Shoah. We recognized that our continent's diversity is what makes us strong, and preserving diversity became a fundamental goal of our Union – including in our foreign policy. Anti-Semitism – as well as all forms of racism – is an attack against the very foundations of our European Union: it is an attack against all of us. You can rely on our determination to continue our action on this basis within the OSCE.

Over the years, the OSCE has developed a large body of commitments to combat anti-Semitism. They are also solidly anchored in the wider framework of OSCE commitments to combat all forms of intolerance and discrimination and to promote the rule of law and universal respect for fundamental freedoms.

The work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in combating anti-Semitism and intolerance, and hate crimes, whatever their motives, is a valuable tool available to the participating States. In that context, we should particularly like to pay tribute to the work carried out under the ODIHR programme “Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism”, which since 2016 has produced a multitude of targeted activities, for example combating anti-Semitism through education. As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles, we cannot let society fall prey to collective amnesia, and it is our duty to educate young generations unceasingly. An awareness of history never engenders competition among victims but rather builds solidarity between them, beyond their differences, and strengthens the determination to defend universal human rights principles as guaranteed by international documents.

Moreover, we welcome the granting to the EU of the status of permanent international partner in the IHRA last November. We believe that the non-legally-binding working definition of anti-Semitism adopted by the IHRA in 2016 is a useful instrument for combating anti-Semitism.

Finally, we should like to take this opportunity to welcome the organization by the Slovak Chairmanship of the Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region to be held in Bratislava next week.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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