



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1229 Vienna, 23 May 2019**

### **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. We thank him for his comprehensive statement, and for distributing the text well ahead of time.

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 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 High Commissioner and underline that co-operation of all participating States is necessary to enable the High Commissioner to fulfil his mandate.

We support the HCNM's active engagement throughout the OSCE region. We fully agree with him on the need for participating States to take into account *The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations in Inter-State Relations* and ensure that "conferral of citizenship respects the principles of friendly, including good neighbourly, relations and territorial sovereignty." 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 minorities, in line with international standards and commitments and also his engagement with regard to language and education issues, access to media and the right to profess and practice a religion in a mother tongue, dialogue facilitation, as well as effective participation in public affairs and property rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Further, we welcome the continued focus of the High Commissioner on thematic work, and efforts to promote implementation of the Institution's rich body of thematic guidelines and recommendations. We commend the HCNM on the launch of the *Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the*

*Media in the Digital Age*, and we look forward to the anniversary of the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*.

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 appreciate the continuous engagement of the HCNM in order to ensure the implementation of the Venice Commission's opinions.

We appreciate the attention devoted to gender. As you point out in your Report, women belonging to national minorities can be exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and we need to do more to ensure their participation in the OSCE's work. As you rightly say, this is a fundamental prerequisite for social cohesion and conflict prevention. In addition to the concrete taskings to the HCNM, such as in the Gender Action Plan, we commend you for taking a gender-sensitive approach in your activities.

Last but not least, we welcome the important place you give to youth in your intervention and we reaffirm our firm support to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). We share your view that meaningful participation of young people is key for diverse societies to be truly resilient to conflict. We look forward to the second edition of an event your institution will be hosting later this year at the United Nations in New York, in cooperation with the 2019 Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE, on the role and inclusion of youth in peace and security efforts. In this regard, we were very pleased that the Max van der Stoep Award jury decided in 2018 to present the prize to a group of students from Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In closing, we congratulate the HCNM and his team on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the appointment of the first High Commissioner. In the 25 years since its foundation, your institution has proven to be a core conflict prevention instrument for the whole OSCE area.

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

The Candidate Countries 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 UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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