



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement in Response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Amb. Kairat Abdrakhmanov

The European Union warmly welcomes the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov to the Permanent Council, for the first time in this capacity, and thanks him for the comprehensive report.

The EU 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 and 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 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.

Conflict prevention and early warning are 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 the 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 commend the HCNM for devoting more attention to gender equality, and for taking a gender-sensitive approach in all activities. Women and girls belonging to national minorities have an increased risk of exposure to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and we need to do more to ensure their rights and participation. We look forward to hearing more about the research into the intersectionality between issues related to gender equality and national minorities, focusing on thematic areas central to the HCNM's work; such as participation of women belonging to minorities in political and public life and their access to socio-economic rights, and the contribution of women belonging to minorities to peace and security, as mentioned in your report.

We also welcome your special attention on youth, as young people are important partners in addressing the root causes of segregation and exclusion, which contribute to divisions in society, and ultimately to conflict.

We would like to commend you, and your team, for adjusting your working methods to the current pandemic situation. We welcome the HCNM's pro-active response during this crisis, including issuing policy recommendations on *Streamlining diversity: COVID-19 measures that support social cohesion*.

We appreciate your continued close cooperation with other OSCE structures and relevant international and regional institutions, in particular the UN, the EU, and the Council of Europe. We commend your continuous engagement in order to ensure the implementation of the Venice Commission's opinions. We value the important work on the issues of statelessness in cooperation with the UN.

We reiterate our support for the HCNM's thematic work, and efforts to promote implementation of thematic guidelines and recommendations. In this regard, we look forward to the 25th Anniversary Conference of *The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*, the 15th anniversary of *The Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*, as well as the Max van der Stoep Award.

We thank the High Commissioner and his able team for their tireless and much needed work, 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, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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