



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1291 Vienna, 26 November 2020

EU Statement in response to the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The European Union warmly welcomes the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. George Tsereteli. Since the last time we met, in January, the world has changed dramatically, heavily impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented challenge for the entire global community requiring global solidarity, international cooperation, effective collective action, and transparency.

In this new context, we welcome the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly aimed at ensuring continuity to its work, also through innovative tools such as the Web Dialogues. It is indeed essential for democracy throughout the OSCE that the national parliaments continue to function during this crisis, when challenges, such as disinformation, corruption and restriction of human rights, are exacerbated.

We also appreciate the attention paid by the PA to the impact of the pandemic and the focus on those who are most vulnerable, including people living in conflict areas and women. In this regard, the PA Special Representative Dr. Hedy Fry's survey on "The gender Impacts of COVID-19" provides important food for thought. We share Dr. Fry's conclusion that the pandemic represents a significant threat to gender equality and echo her appeal, addressed to all participating States, to

translate the current crisis in an opportunity, by implementing “measures to build on gender equality now and once COVID-19 is behind us”.

Mr. President, conflict situations and protracted conflicts in our region pose a very serious threat to the security of the entire OSCE area. The EU welcomes the cessation of hostilities in and around Nagorno-Karabakh following the Russia-brokered ceasefire of 9 November agreed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The EU will follow closely the implementation of the provisions of the cease fire which is indispensable to prevent further loss of life. International humanitarian law must be respected and humanitarian access must be guaranteed for all the people affected by the conflict. We reiterate our full support to the OSCE Minsk Group, led by its Co-Chairs, and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, in their search of a negotiated, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the conflict, including on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The EU recalls its firm opposition against the use of force as a mean to settle disputes.

The EU reiterates its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We welcome the tangible commitment by the sides to the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire which were agreed in the Trilateral Contact Group in July. This has been the longest period of ceasefire since the onset of the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces since February 2014 and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation, which we will not recognize.

The EU reaffirms its full support for the endeavours of the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. We continue to call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution to the conflict in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We call on Russia to fulfil its responsibility in this regard.

In the last few months, another disturbing crisis has been unfolding within the OSCE region. The unfair and unfree elections in Belarus, held in breach of

international commitments and obligations, have been followed by a dramatic deterioration of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in the country. We strongly condemn the use of violence by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, representatives of civil society, independent media, religious leaders and ordinary Belarusian citizens as confirmed by the rapporteur under the Moscow Mechanism. Against this backdrop, the EU has imposed sanctions on individuals responsible for violent repression and intimidation, and stands ready to impose additional sanctions. In reiterating our call on the Belarusian authorities to change the course of their actions and adhere to the OSCE commitments and international obligations, we stress that the EU would be ready to support a peaceful democratic transition in the country. In this context, the EU also highly appreciates the efforts by the OSCE PA, such as the online meeting organized on 23 September by the Bureau of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the leader of the Belarusian opposition, Ms Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, in which the head of Belarusian delegation to the OSCE PA, Mr Andrei Savinykh, also took part.

Mr. President, we appreciate your engagement for peaceful settlements of the protracted conflicts, including the conflict in Georgia and the Transdniestrian settlement process, which are priorities for the European Union. The parliamentarians can contribute to creating favorable conditions for the settlement of such conflicts, especially in strengthening political will directed to tangible progress. The EU supports the existing formats of negotiations and calls on all actors involved to enhance their commitment to conflict settlement. We will continue to promote and support confidence building measures to assist in the resolution of those conflicts, in co-operation with other relevant interlocutors.

The EU values the cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE autonomous Institutions for the promotion of comprehensive security in the OSCE region. The human dimension remains among our key priorities, as lasting security cannot be sustained without full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and rule of law.

We welcome the Parliamentary Assembly's endeavors to guarantee election observation during the pandemic and the resumption of its activities on the

occasion of the 30 August parliamentary elections in Montenegro. In this regard, the EU reiterates its strong support for ODIHR's methodology in observing elections, as a gold standard that is internationally recognized, and the independent, impartial and professional manner in which it is implemented by the Parliamentary Assembly, in partnership with ODIHR. Respect for election OSCE commitments, in line with international standards and obligations, is a key element of long-term security and stability, safeguarding the principle that the will of the people, freely expressed in periodic and genuine elections, constitutes the basis for the authority of government.

We also appreciate the efforts of the various PA special representatives and committees to address specific cross-cutting issues or geographical areas that can truly benefit from parliamentary attention. The EU also supports your endeavours in building up parliamentary relations with our Mediterranean Partners, as we share the view that stronger ties among Parliaments from both sides of the Mediterranean Sea are necessary to address security in the OSCE area. We also appreciate your intention to exploit opportunities to similarly engage with the Asian Partners for Cooperation.

Today, in a time of pandemic, the need to promote multilateral solutions to our common challenges is more urgent than ever. Against this background, the EU recognizes the role played by parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening international security and co-operation. We highly value, in particular, the concrete contribution that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its members can offer to a deeper implementation of OSCE principles and commitments, as well as to the promotion and achievement of common goals.

Mr. President, the EU would like to sincerely commend you on your able leadership and your continuous commitment to reinforcing our Organization. We assure you of the EU's continued interest in effective cooperation between the parliamentary and the intergovernmental dimensions of the OSCE.

To conclude, a few days after the 30th Anniversary of the Charter of Paris we underline the need for all participating States to relaunch cooperative relations founded on the respect of principles and commitments, consistent with a rules-based international order.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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