



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1295 Vienna, 10 December 2020**

#### **EU Statement in response to the Address by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić**

The European Union warmly welcomes to the Permanent Council the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić.

The longstanding, structured cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe is based on complementarity. As foreseen in the July 2020 Council Conclusions on EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe, our joint activities focus on the three pillars around which the Council of Europe's activity is structured: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. For both the Council of Europe and the OSCE, the implementation of existing obligations and commitments by all members and participating States is essential. In connection with the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, we reaffirm our commitment to the EU's accession to the Convention. On this anniversary, we also commend the indispensable work of the European Court of Human Rights, while emphasizing our firm support to the full execution of the Court's Judgments.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a new set of challenges for the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We echo the appeals by the OSCE Albanian Chairmanship, Secretary General and OSCE autonomous institutions that all relevant measures should be necessary, proportionate, temporary and in compliance with the rule of law and international commitments. The Council of Europe plays an important role in ensuring that member States' responses to the pandemic fully respect our shared norms and values and are based on human rights

standards. This is a time for solidarity, and coordination in multilateral fora is much needed.

We welcome the continuous dialogue and practical cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, in particular in the identified priority areas: combatting trafficking in human beings, fight against terrorism, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and protection of human rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

All of these areas have sadly continued to be high on the agenda during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we would like to highlight in particular four areas of work in which cooperation could be further strengthened.

First, countering all forms of torture is an area in which joint work has already proven productive. In this context, we welcome the adoption by the OSCE Ministerial Council of the decision on the prohibition and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), set up under the Council of Europe's "European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", provides a non-judicial preventive mechanism to protect persons deprived of their liberty against torture and other forms of ill-treatment, complementing the judicial work of the European Court of Human Rights.

Second, today marks the end of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. This international campaign emphasized the link between violence against women and human rights. We have witnessed a worrying increase in domestic violence on a global scale during the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations has called the surge in domestic violence a "shadow pandemic".

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) defines a set of standards for combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence. It has been ratified and is being implemented by 21 EU Member States. At the OSCE, on the other hand, there is an extensive body of commitments complemented by thematic

reports, data collection and projects of the OSCE institutions, structures and field missions.

Now is the time to further strengthen the cooperation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE in combating sexual and gender-based violence. As stated in MC decision 4/18, it is important to actively engage men and boys in the efforts to end violence against women and girls, including by addressing the root causes of gender inequality and violence.

Third, the pandemic has also presented new challenges to election observation activities. The situation has required new and innovative approaches to ensure that meaningful and high quality observation can still be conducted. Partnership and information sharing between OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament provides for better results, in particular in these challenging times.

Fourth, the pandemic and restrictions connected to it, has further impacted the space of civil society and put pressure on human rights defenders, as well as free and independent media. It is important that we continue to work together to ensure media freedom, including safety of journalists, and to safeguard the working condition of civil society, whose role in protecting human rights and democracy is vital. Strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society in the activities of both the OSCE and the Council of Europe is of great importance for the European Union.

In concluding, the EU looks forward to continuing the close cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe and we wish you, Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić, every success in the exercise of your mandate. The EU takes the opportunity to thank the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and wish the very best to Germany which has recently assumed its Presidency.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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