



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1262 Vienna, 12 March 2020

#### **EU Statement on the occasion of the International Women's Day**

International Women's Day is more than just a day. It is an occasion to reflect on the progress made over the years in promoting women's and girls' rights and gender equality and an opportunity to call for change where it is still needed. Gender equality must be taken into account every day, not just on International Women's Day.

Gender equality is a matter of human rights, of democracy and justice. It is also an engine driving economic growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, it is instrumental to conflict-resolution and peacebuilding because it enables more legitimate and sustainable peace processes. Accordingly, the matter is directly related to the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security.

Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union. The EU and its Member States have been committed to gender equality as a fundamental right since 1957. The EU has made significant progress in gender equality over the last decades. This is the result of equality legislation, gender mainstreaming, integration of the gender perspective into all other policies, as well as specific measures for the advancement of women.

However, there is still a long way to go to full gender equality. In 2020 women still face too many gender-related structural barriers on their way. In Europe and beyond, in the entire OSCE area, women and girls continue to be targets of gender discrimination, stereotyping, and gender-based violence, including sexual violence and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The latest data from the OSCE-led survey on *Well-being and Safety of Women*, which complemented the survey conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency some years ago, are alarming.

This year, on International Women's Day, the European Commission launched the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. The key objectives are ending gender-based violence; challenging gender stereotypes; closing gender gaps in the labour market; achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy; addressing the gender pay and pension gaps; closing the gender care gap and achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics. The Strategy pursues a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions, and intersectionality is a horizontal principle for its implementation. While the Strategy focuses on actions within the EU, the EU's external policy on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is coherent with its objectives.

Gender equality is a core element of our continuous engagement with our partners worldwide. The EU is striving to accelerate the efforts towards gender equality in the different fields of its external action, as part of the implementation of our OSCE commitments and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Strategy is a contribution to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – a landmark document to advance on equality between women and men – which marks this year the 25th anniversary since its adoption. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the outcomes of their review conferences and remain committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. The EU will continue to support, promote and protect women's and girls' rights and empowerment of women and girls, while tackling gender-based violence, including in fragile, conflict and emergency situations. In this context, we welcome the holding of the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering for equality organized by UN Women this year that will bring together governments, civil society and the private sector to set an agenda to achieve concrete and measurable results over the next five years.

The EU Gender Equality Strategy should be seen also as a further step in the implementation of our OSCE commitments. All OSCE participating States have committed to gender equality, as well as to advancing women's participation in political and public life in various Ministerial Council Decisions and in the OSCE Gender Action Plan 2004. We stress the importance of these commitments and call for their full implementation. We look forward to the Gender Review Conference that will take place this summer. This conference is a timely opportunity to take stock of

the implementation of our OSCE commitments and to reflect over the need to further strengthen them to address existing gaps and new and emerging trends.

We value the work of OSCE Secretariat, autonomous institutions and field missions in supporting participating States in implementing their OSCE commitments. Systematic inclusion of a gender perspective into the monitoring and evaluation of all OSCE activities, programmes and projects is essential.

Referring to this year's theme of International Women's Day – *Generation Equality* – we would like to underline that the most effective way to ensure generational equality is through education which is a core element in building resilient and prosperous societies. Equal access to education, ensuring that everyone, including women and girls, is free to pursue their chosen path in life and to participate equally in and lead our societies is a responsibility that rests on the shoulders of our generation.

Gender equality is our common vision and mindset and we stand ready to work tirelessly, inside and outside the European Union, to make it a reality.

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, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, 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.