



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1319 Vienna, 10 June 2021**

#### **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.

We highly value the long-standing cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe, which is focused on the three pillars of the Council of Europe's activity: 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. The EU reaffirms its commitment to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights, with the objective to reinforce the common values of the Union and enhance the coherence of human rights protection in Europe. 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.

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

Ms. Secretary General, in your report "A democratic renewal for Europe", you note a clear and worrying degree of democratic backsliding in Europe. The report states that

“Europe’s democratic environment and democratic institutions are in mutually reinforcing decline”. Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly have been curtailed in many countries, the rule of law has weakened and human dignity has suffered. New challenges, like online hate speech and the impact of the unethical use of artificial intelligence on human rights have increasingly come to the fore. We support your call for a democratic revival in Europe and a return to respect for fundamental democratic principles.

The negative trends outlined above have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We echo your appeal that all relevant restrictive measures should be necessary, proportionate, temporary and in compliance with the rule of law and international commitments. In this respect, better coordination in multilateral fora is needed.

In addition to the four priority areas of cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, we would like to highlight in particular four areas of work, in which cooperation could be further strengthened.

First, and echoing the call in your annual report, safeguarding the space of civil society, human rights defenders, and free and independent media is a matter of priority. We should continue to work together to ensure media freedom, including safety of journalists and other media actors, and to safeguard the working condition of civil society, whose role in protecting human rights and democracy is vital. Strengthening the meaningful participation of civil society in the activities of the OSCE and the Council of Europe is of great importance for the EU.

Second, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in domestic violence and violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the 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, there is an extensive body of commitments complemented by reports, data collection and projects of the OSCE institutions, structures and field missions. Now is the time to further strengthen the

cooperation between the two organizations in combating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Third, countering all forms of torture is an area in which joint work has already proven productive. In this context, we welcome the Tirana MC 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.

Fourth, 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 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.

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 German Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and wish the very best to Hungary, 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, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, 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.