



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1353 Vienna, 3 February 2022

#### **EU Statement in response to the Address by Benedetto Della Vedova, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes to the Permanent Council Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy, Mr. Benedetto Della Vedova. We strongly support the program of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe including its three main themes.
2. The EU intends to further strengthen its long-standing cooperation with the Council of Europe, which plays a crucial standard-setting role in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. For both the Council of Europe and the OSCE, the faithful implementation of principles, enshrined in the founding documents of both international organisations, as well as all existing obligations and commitments by all members and participating States is essential. The European Union will continue to stand in their defense. The EU reaffirms its commitment to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights, with the objective of reinforcing the common values of the Union and enhancing 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.
3. 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 protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities.
4. Mr. Deputy Minister, the Council of Europe has in recent years reported a worrying degree of democratic backsliding in some European countries. The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly have been curtailed, the Rule of Law

has weakened and human dignity has suffered. New challenges, such as online hate speech and the impact of the harmful use of artificial intelligence on human rights have increasingly come to the fore. These negative trends have been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is therefore very timely that the Italian Presidency aims at *“building a future based on the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law”*. We must work together to ensure a return to the full respect for fundamental democratic principles and international law. We reiterate that their violation is the greatest obstacle to a common, indivisible security space in the OSCE region. Lasting security cannot be sustained without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

5. We believe that there is considerable complementarity between the work of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. In addition to the four priority areas of cooperation already mentioned, we would like to highlight in particular two areas of work, in which cooperation between the organizations could be further strengthened.
6. First, safeguarding the space of civil society, human rights defenders, and the 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 conditions 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 European Union.
7. Second, as you note in your presidency program, 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.

8. We are happy to note that these two areas of work are well reflected in various ways in your Presidency program. We also welcome your focus on the effect of artificial intelligence (AI) on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. AI presents both an opportunity and a challenge for our societies, which should be comprehensively addressed.
9. In concluding, the EU looks forward to continuing the close cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe and we wish you, Deputy Minister Benedetto Della Vedova, every success during your Presidency. The EU also takes the opportunity to thank Hungary as the previous Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

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.