EU Statement on “The OSCE and its neighbourhood: challenges and opportunities arising from migration”

Today, an unprecedented number of people are displaced across the globe, driven by geopolitical, economic or other factors and additionally fuelled by unscrupulous traffickers and smugglers who seek to benefit from the desperation of people in vulnerable situations. For the majority of migrants, migration is a voluntary and empowering experience that, when regulated and orderly, can contribute to economic development of countries. Yet, too many have to endure human rights violations, xenophobia, exploitation and unacceptable living conditions along their journeys.

Two years ago when we also discussed migration at the ASRC, Europe had just witnessed a peak in 2015 of arrivals of refugees and migrants at its shores and borders. At that time we recalled that the unprecedented number of migrants and refugees globally is not a temporary phenomenon and that the international community must step up efforts to find common, sustainable and long-term solutions to this global challenge. We underline the importance of a comprehensive approach to these issues, as outlined in the New York Declaration, approved two years ago. We continue to believe that these common efforts must address the ongoing migratory flows in the immediate and short term, while it is also highly important to address migration as a long-term challenge and opportunity.

In the meantime in the OSCE we have adopted a Ministerial Council Decision on the role of our organisation in the governance of large movements of migrants and refugees and we have been seeking ways to operationalise it. This underlines our conviction that the OSCE can in a meaningful way complement the international actions. We also believe that the OSCE activities in this field should always be based on value added, non-duplication, should fall in the field of co-operative and multi-
dimensional security.

In our view, when turning the Hamburg Ministerial Council Decision into action, the OSCE should build on its existing valuable migration-related work in areas such as border management, combatting smuggling and trafficking in human beings, providing a platform for sharing experiences and best practices in the field of labour migration, or promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, while countering a distorted narrative of migration.

The OSCE’s convening power has been invoked many times as one of its comparative advantages. Genuine engagement and dialogue including with our partners for cooperation and among countries of origin, transit and destination in this forum can complement and add value to the global response.

For the EU protecting and upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their status, has always been and will always be our priority. We are working relentlessly, inside and outside the European Union, in close cooperation with our international partners to save lives, provide protection, offer safe and legal pathways for migration and tackle the root causes that force people to leave their homes in the first place, as well as fight the criminal networks that often take advantage of people's despair. These are at the heart of our European Agenda on Migration.

The European Union fully embeds the issue of migration in its overall foreign policy dialogue with third countries, keeping in mind that some of these countries are equally, if not more, affected by migratory flows than Europe. Therefore, the external dimension of the EU’s migration policy focuses extensively on cooperation with third countries on tackling the root causes, enhancing the protection of migrants and refugees, stemming irregular flows to Europe and returning those found to have no right to international protection.

Besides targeted migration-related activities we also take a broader view on the phenomenon of migration, forced displacement and its root causes. In this context we reiterate our strong commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which unites our global efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, stabilize countries and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind so that people do not feel compelled or are not forced to leave
their homes. The OSCE with its comprehensive approach to security is well placed to contribute to this agenda.

The Candidate Countries TURKEY, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries 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. * The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.