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PC.DEL/540/04
23 June 2004

ENGLISH only

**Permanent Mission of Ireland
to the OSCE**

Rotenturmstrasse 16-18,
A-1010 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 71576 9826
Fax: +43 1 715 5755

ireland-osce@chello.at

Irish Presidency of the European Union

EU Statement

ASRC 2004 Session 1 – Preventing and Combating Terrorism

I take the floor on behalf of the Presidency of the European Union.

As I do so, I wish to add my voice to the comments of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, who has given a comprehensive account on key areas of European Union and, in particular, to his comments on the importance of continued cooperation between the EU and the OSCE.

The Irish Presidency assures Mr. de Vries of our fullest support as he seeks to improve the coordination and visibility of the EU's response to terrorism.

Mr. de Vries has already spoken about specific actions the EU is taking on terrorism, and I do not propose to recover this ground. Rather, I would like to briefly highlight the thinking and principles which underline the EU's current approach to meeting the terrorist threat.

On March 11 last, the European Union became a direct victim of terrorist violence when nearly 200 people were killed in the horrific bombings in Madrid. Member States of the Union were swift in their response. The Irish Presidency worked closely with the Commission and the Council Secretariat in preparing a wide-ranging Declaration on Combating Terrorism setting out a comprehensive, long-term series of measures designed to meet this challenge. This Declaration was adopted by the European Council, just two weeks after the Madrid attacks. A related Declaration on Solidarity Against Terrorism was also adopted at the March Council. This demonstrated the strong political will of EU Member States to work closely together and to make it clear that a terrorist attack on the territory of one Member State would be considered an attack on all.

The Declaration comprises a comprehensive package of strategic measures. It balances the need for swift and effective action to ensure the safety of EU citizens, against the need to develop a comprehensive strategy addressing all aspects of the terrorist threat. It called for the full implementation of already agreed measures in the Justice and Home Affairs Area. However, it also introduced innovative new measures including the adoption of the Council Directive on Compensation to crime victims and the establishment of the post of EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator.

The Declaration also outlined proposals for further action in areas including; the financing of terrorism, transport security and border controls, cooperation with international partners and recruitment to terrorism. It set out seven key objectives which now form the basis of the EU's detailed Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism.

In the twelve weeks since the Declaration was adopted significant progress has been made on a number of key issues. This has primarily been in the Justice and Home Affairs related areas. Notable steps include; the Regulation introducing new functions for the Schengen Information System, the Council Decision establishing the Visa Information System; and the Europol and Eurojust Agreement. Progress has also been made on issues such as confiscation orders, the re-establishment of the Europol Counter-Terrorism Task Force and the establishment of a European Borders Agency. The EU aims to improve its intelligence capacity through, in particular, increased cooperation between national security services.

However, the EU recognises that terrorism will remain a long-term challenge. At its June meeting, the European Council adopted the revised Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism. The Plan sets out a comprehensive, wide-ranging series of time-specific tasks designed to meet all aspects of the terrorist threat.

The European Union remains fully aware that the fight against terrorism does not stop at our borders. Member States of the OSCE, most recently Russia and Turkey, continue to be victims of terrorist attack. Cooperation with our international partners remains central to the EU's overall strategy. We remain mindful of our international obligations set out under the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, and of the vital role international and regional organisations, such as the OSCE play, in maintaining a broad global consensus on this issue. Indeed, I recall that the Madrid bombings coincided with a UN Counter-Terrorism Committee meeting here in Vienna. International organisations were meeting to discuss enhancing regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism in a conference that was co-hosted by the OSCE and the UNODC. Fora such as these provide useful opportunities for different groups to come together and exchange views and best practice on a wide range of counter-terrorist initiatives. Similarly, regional organisations play a vital role in helping their members meet their international commitments. I would like to reiterate the sentiments expressed by Mr. de Vries in acknowledging the outstanding efforts on counter-terrorism the OSCE has made in recent times. European Union Member States will continue to provide every support possible to the OSCE in progressing this important ongoing work.

While ensuring the safety of our citizens and preventing further attacks are the immediate priorities for EU action, we recognise that security measures alone will never completely eliminate terrorist violence. In the longer term, we must look at those factors which contribute to both recruitment to, and support for, terrorism. There is not and can never be any justification for terrorist actions. However we must realise that further work is required if we are to prevent people from turning to terrorism in the future. Under the Irish Presidency, work was initiated in examining these important areas, and the EU is committed to pursuing this as a priority in the months and years ahead.

In conclusion, while we acknowledge the need for effective action in fight against terrorism, the European Union is firmly of the view that all actions in combating terrorism must be conducted in accordance with due process and the rule of law. There can be no trade-off between effective counter-terrorism and respect for human

rights; indeed, it is the view of the European Union that each is a precondition for the other.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this statement.