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**EU OPENING STATEMENT AT THE 13<sup>TH</sup> ECONOMIC FORUM,  
PRAGUE, 23-27 MAY 2005**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,  
Commissioner Špidla, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The European Union is very pleased to participate in this year's Economic Forum of the OSCE. We view the theme of "Demographic Trends, Migration and Integrating Persons belonging to National Minorities: Ensuring Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE area" as a most valuable contribution to the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE. We hope that the discussions and useful suggestions made during the Preparatory Seminars will be followed up after this year's Forum.

The European Union wishes to express its satisfaction at developments in the Economic and Environmental Dimension during recent years and stands ready to help further strengthen the Economic and Environmental Dimension. The adoption in Maastricht in 2003 of the new OSCE Strategy Document complementing the Bonn Document has clearly given new impetus to the Economic and Environmental Sub-Committee as well as structure to the work of the Office of the Coordinator and the activities of the Economic and Environmental Officers in the field.

We would also like to mention the adoption at the Ministerial Council in Sofia of Decision 10/04 on "Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Economic Forum". We believe that the conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE and the UNECE is an important step in this direction. We participate actively in the "Informal Group of Friends of the Chair on Enhancement of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension" and look forward to its report which is due by 15 June 2005.

Turning to this year's theme, we believe that the issues of demographic development, migration and integration of persons belonging to national minorities are complex ones and need to be addressed cross-dimensionally. That is why we appreciate this topic being selected by Slovenia as one of the main themes of their Chairmanship.

Demographic developments are of outstanding importance. The member states of the European Union are undertaking a number of measures to alleviate their negative impact. In this context migration plays an important role. Several member states have therefore adjusted their policies towards migrants.

Migration has to be carefully managed. In order to accomplish this goal the European Commission has developed a green paper. At the second preparatory seminar a suggestion was made to further discuss this paper and we are ready to do that.

The EU is committed to the integration of persons belonging to national minorities. We believe that integration is the best way to reduce the risk of tensions. Integration is an aspect of good governance and the creation of a genuinely democratic and representative society. We welcome the suggestion made by the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities to draft a “statement of principles” on integration. In the area of economic and social life it is important to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities have the same opportunities as the majority population. The OSCE in its Economic and Environmental Dimension can also contribute to their economic and social integration.

In these three fields the concept of good governance is of great importance. Therefore we welcome the fact that good governance constitutes the centrepiece of the new Strategy Document. In this regard, we appreciate the adoption of Decision 11/04 on Combating Corruption by the Sofia Ministerial Council in December 2004.

The European Union would like to welcome the theme “Transportation in the OSCE area” chosen by the incoming Belgian Chairmanship for the 2006 Economic Forum. We hope that a decision with regard to the theme of the 2006 Forum can be reached as soon as possible.

Finally, Mr. Chair, we would like to thank the Czech authorities for hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> Economic Forum and for their warm welcome here in Prague. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Slovenian Chairmanship and to the Office of the Co-ordinator for their efforts in organising this forum. We are looking forward to interesting and fruitful discussions during the week ahead.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania and the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia<sup>1</sup> align themselves with this statement.

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<sup>1</sup>Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process