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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1286th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

22 October 2020

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Claus Neukirch

The European Union welcomes Claus Neukirch, Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, and thanks him for his fifth report to the Permanent Council. The continuing challenges posed by COVID-19 emerge clearly from that report, and we wish once again to thank the Mission for pursuing its work in conditions that are now even more difficult.

The European Union reiterates its support for a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, with a special status for Transdniestria.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, full co-operation between the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol is more necessary than ever to protect the health of the people living on both sides of the Dniester, who are affected in equal measure by the coronavirus. Complete transparency regarding the public health situation is required to combat COVID-19. We therefore support the recommendations issued by the World Health Organization following its mission to Transdniestria on 6 May this year. We continue to encourage the parties to convene a meeting of the working group on health care as soon as possible and to co-ordinate their actions in combating this pandemic.

We note with concern the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Transdniestria and condemn in particular the abduction on 7 and 8 October of four individuals by the supposed security services of the Transdniestrian region, two of whom are still in detention. We call on the self-proclaimed authorities in Transdniestria to release these two individuals immediately and without conditions. We emphasize the importance of compliance with OSCE commitments and international law as regards human rights and fundamental freedoms and call for respect, in particular, for freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

We note with concern that certain measures are still in place, including the unilateral, ad hoc and unauthorized installation, without any co-ordination with the Joint Control Commission, of new Transdniestrian checkpoints established since March 2020 in the Security Zone, which restrict the right of individuals to exercise their freedom of movement and affect the economy and functioning of the health services in the region. We urge the self-proclaimed authorities of Transdniestria to take all the necessary steps without delay to re-establish full freedom of movement between the two banks of the Dniester, especially for medical personnel. We recall in this regard the undertakings in the “Berlin plus package” regarding free movement in the region.

We also support the efforts by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to hold a new meeting in the “5+2” format, the only mechanism for achieving a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict. This would help in particular to make further positive progress, in accordance with the results-based approach, regarding respect for human rights and freedom of movement and the implementation of the confidence-building measures agreed on in Berlin in 2016 and in Vienna in 2017, with full respect for the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders.

Full implementation of the “package of eight” measures remains essential. With regard to the telecommunications sector, we continue to exhort the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to intensify the dialogue with the private operators concerned with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution. We also note the positive developments in the situation of Latin-script schools in the Transdnistrian region. We are counting on the Mission’s support in closely monitoring the developments required for their normal and sustainable operation.

We expect tangible progress to be achieved in the three “baskets” of the agenda agreed for the negotiation process, in particular on the political, institutional and security issues of the third basket.

We welcome the deployment by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of a limited election observation mission in the Republic of Moldova for the forthcoming presidential election scheduled for 1 November 2020 in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and recall that all the necessary measures should be taken to guarantee the safety of the voters and observers under these circumstances. The election should be held in a credible, inclusive and transparent manner with respect for democratic standards and the rule of law in accordance with the international commitments undertaken by the country and those it has subscribed to through the Association Agreement with the European Union. The European Union urges the authorities in the Republic of Moldova to implement all of the recommendations by the Council of Europe Venice Commission and the ODIHR.

Owing to the high risk posed by weapons and ammunition depots, particularly by the one in Cobasna, we have taken note of the statements by the Russian Federation announcing its intention to destroy the ammunition from this depot. We recall that the OSCE has the mandate and means to contribute to the removal or destruction of Russian munitions and armaments from Transdnistria, and its involvement is essential to the transparency and international verification of these operations.

As indicated at the time of the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova with respect to the Operational Group of Russian Forces, we stress the importance of completing the process embarked on as part of the commitments undertaken at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999.

We call on the Mission to continue to monitor the situation in the Security Zone and to report regularly on incidents there. We reiterate our appeal for strict adherence to the rules established by the Joint Control Commission in the Security Zone.

The European Union stands ready to support the authorities in Chişinău in the implementation of the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia, in order to strengthen the institutional functioning of this region within the Republic of Moldova. We welcome the adoption and implementation of the 2020 plan of action of the working group set up by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to ensure the functionality of the autonomy in Gagauzia and to harmonize national and local legislation.

Finally, the European Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the Republic of Moldova in July providing for a substantial aid package to support the country's efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. This package represents a continuation of the assistance that the European Union has been providing to the Republic of Moldova for many years, be it through the Eastern Partnership, the Association Agreement, the Free Trade Agreement or the "EU Support to Confidence Building Measures" programme for people on both sides of the Dniester. The European Union will continue to link this aid to the concrete results of reforms that bring tangible advantages to the Moldovan people. The European Union will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Republic of Moldova.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.