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**STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE  
980th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 January 2014

**In response to the statement by Mr. Didier Burkhalter,  
President of the Swiss Confederation**

Mr. President of the Swiss Confederation,

It is a great honour to welcome you today to the Permanent Council of an organization that you will chair for the coming year. Your presence here symbolizes the unswerving commitment of your country, of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and of your remarkable team here in Vienna to make this Chairmanship of the OSCE a success for us all.

Mr. President,

The essential feature of the message that the European Union and its Member States wish to transmit today is contained in the sentence: "We will be with you." We will be with you first of all because we know that the aims you will be pursuing during this year are our shared aims, and your statement this morning confirms that to us.

We agree entirely that the concept of universal security is a major asset of the OSCE. The Organization offers us a platform that should allow us to make progress in establishing an indivisible security community based on respect and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and on democracy and the rule of law, without which, as we have all painfully experienced and as we continue to see every day, there can be no real security either for States or for individuals. Even though the OSCE is an intergovernmental organization of States, we should always bear in mind that the ultimate aim of our efforts and the primordial responsibility of every State is to preserve the security and the rights of each individual.

The OSCE has a rich history of which it can be proud. All of its founding principles have helped to reunify our continent. The Helsinki+40 process should remind us of that and establish our future based on the lessons of our past. Circumstances have changed, of course. But the full application of these principles remains fundamental. We will be with you, Mr. President, in this effort.

The European Union will also be with your Chairmanship because we share your vision of this Organization. The OSCE is a unique organization. It is a platform for co-operation and dialogue, and we must all ensure that they are conducted in an open, honest

manner designed to strengthen respect for our commitments, even if that also involves discussing our weaknesses. But, as you have just reminded us, the OSCE is also the field presences, which are our collective assets. The OSCE is also the independent institutions which impartially monitor respect for human rights, democratic institutions, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and freedom of the media.

Your statement, Mr. President, enumerated a series of priorities. We will be with you as well in strengthening security and stability in the Western Balkans and in your efforts to settle the frozen conflicts in our region within the existing mediation formats in Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. The intelligent and willing manner in which you put your instruments in place, together with the future Serbian Chairmanship, is very encouraging for us. The attention you pay to mediation, in the great tradition of Swiss diplomacy, is also very encouraging. We must be in a position to seize the opportunities, even if it means forcing them a little, when it becomes clear to everyone that the settlement of these conflicts rather than a continuation of the status quo is in the interests of all.

You also have our support in the principal priorities that you have outlined in the three OSCE dimensions. In the politico-military dimension, we shall continue to support all efforts within the Forum for Security Co-operation aiming to update our commitment to transparency, including the modernization of the Vienna Document and the exploration of new ideas on conventional arms control in Europe.

In the first dimension, we need to intensify our efforts to combat transnational threats. The subject is vast and the resources are limited – all the more reason in our eyes for expecting these efforts to be efficient and concentrated on those areas where the OSCE can have a real impact, in particular without duplicating the work of other organizations. The European Union will, of course, support efforts to implement the first set of confidence-building measures in the field of cybersecurity and the search for agreement on new measures, as was decided in Kyiv. We hope to be able to continue working with the Chairmanship and the other participating States and partners on the role that the OSCE might play in Central Asia and to help Afghanistan.

The second dimension has changed immensely since the 1970s because the European context has changed completely, showing moreover in this way the importance of economic and environmental issues. We remain convinced that this dimension can and should be better exploited, particularly with regard to those aspects connected with security and conflict prevention. Good governance, the impact of natural disasters, energy security and water management are important works in progress that we wish to continue pursuing.

In the human dimension, we believe that it is important for us to concentrate on fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, freedom of religion and belief, and freedom of both online and offline media. The prevention of torture, abolition of the death penalty and protection of human rights defenders are also areas where you will find us at your side. Likewise, at the horizontal level, we fully support your plan to promote gender equality within the OSCE. On these and other issues, it is important to do everything to ensure that our commitments are implemented effectively. The credibility of our Organization and of the States participating in it and, most important, the security of our citizens are at stake. In these and other areas, the involvement of civil society and young generations is vital. We welcome your initiative for interaction with its representatives.

We have embarked together on a process that, on the 40th anniversary of the Organization, is endeavouring to maximize efficiency in the pursuit of our common interests. We endorse your approach and will support your efforts and those of your co-ordinators. We must be pragmatic and efficient and make the necessary improvements during the next two years with an open mind. Your efforts to ensure continuity between the next two Chairmanships have already borne fruit.

Mr. President, you have called for pragmatism in the budget negotiations. We shall continue to work in this spirit. We remain convinced that in the enduring difficult economic context for many of us, the OSCE must continue to implement a responsible and efficient budgetary policy. We firmly believe as well that the measures to optimize our resources, including a reform of the scales of contributions, are priority issues.

Mr. President, our expectations of an OSCE Chairmanship are always high like this. We have no doubt that you see this as a major challenge. But we also ask you to see it as a compliment, a mark of recognition of an approach that combines modesty and ambition, a sense of compromise, principles, interests and values. You should also see it as an acknowledgement of your commitment and the intelligence of your entire team.

I should like to conclude, Mr. President, by reiterating the words stated at the outset: “The European Union will be with you.”

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup> and Montenegro<sup>1</sup>, the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, the member of the European Free Trade Association Liechtenstein, as well as Moldova, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

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1 The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.