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EU statement in response to the address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia, H.E. Mr. Gordan Jandroković

The European Union warmly welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia, H.E. Mr. Gordan Jandroković, to the Permanent Council. We thank him for his address, which we have listened to with great interest.

Mr. Minister, the EU shares your views on the usefulness and timeliness of the Corfu process that helps us all to identify and articulate problematic areas of common concern and that will, as we believe, contribute to find answers and ways to address these concerns. Less than a month before the Ministerial Council Meeting, the intensive work in Vienna culminates and therefore we welcome the expressed will and dedication of Croatia to assist in achieving the ambitious goals of the Greek Chairmanship.

Croatia shows its strong commitments to our common OSCE efforts by its involvement in a wide range of activities. This has been showed inter alia in the preparation of an Expert Workshop on the Comprehensive Approach to Cyber Security that will be held in

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Zagreb at the end of this month, as well as in the autumn session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Dubrovnik, scheduled for 2011.

The EU highly appreciates the active role Croatia plays in strengthening global security. As a current non-permanent member of the Security Council and a troop-contributing country participating in UN peacekeeping missions throughout the world, Croatia shows its dedication to shared and assigned responsibility.

In October 2005 accession negotiations between the EU and Croatia were opened. Now, four years later, we are pleased to say that the progress achieved in Croatia in numerous chapters means that technical preparations in the negotiations are nearing their final phase. In this respect, the EU welcomes the recent progress that has led to a substantial number of chapters being opened and closed at the Intergovernmental conference last month and encourages the Croatian government to continue in its efforts.

The EU considers Croatia an important actor for stabilisation in South Eastern Europe and highly values its engagement in a wide range of regional activities and initiatives. Good neighbourly relations form an essential part of the progress of the whole region. In this respect we are convinced that issues of return and integration of refugees also have an important regional dimension and should be resolved with no political connotations.

The EU commends the excellent work of the OSCE Office in both mandate related areas, resulting also in adoption of the government's two six-monthly Action Plans regarding certain war-

crimes related issues. The EU acknowledges that significant results have been achieved in recent years by Croatia with regard to the revision of in-absentia verdicts from the 1990s and encourages the Croatian authorities to address residual aspects of this issue. Moreover, with a view to challenging impunity, the EU would also like to call upon Croatia to tackle the issue of un-prosecuted war crimes. The work done has been achieved in particular thanks to the constructive dialogue being maintained between the Office and the host country's authorities, through ministerial level Plenary Meetings. We encourage the Croatian authorities to build on the progress made and to continue the implementation of these issues in a structural manner. The EU appreciates ongoing development of a capable network of NGOs in the view of the need for sustainability of the war crime trials monitoring that will still last on for years.

The EU welcomes that implementation of the housing care programs for the former tenancy rights holders who wish to return to Croatia has progressed quite well over the past year. At the same time we recognise that further progress is required in this area. It is important that budget cuts necessary in the context of the economic crisis do not weigh negatively on refugee return issues.

During the last 13 years, since the Mission to Croatia was established, the country has come a long way forward. The discussion about the future role of the OSCE in Croatia will take place at the end of this year and we can assure you, Mr. Minister, that the EU will consider your appeal to find a responsible solution to this matter in a good spirit on the basis of a fair assessment of the implementation of the mandate. The EU has a profound interest that the OSCE activities in Croatia be a success story for the OSCE as well as for the Republic of Croatia.

Madam Chairperson, in conclusion, we would like once again to thank H.E. Mr. Gordan Jandroković, for addressing the Permanent Council today, and wish him and his country all the best for the challenging tasks ahead.

The candidate countries TURKEY and the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and MONTENEGRO, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

*The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.