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EU statement in response to the report of the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Werner Almhofer

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Werner Almhofer, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, back to the Permanent Council and would like to thank him for his comprehensive report. We appreciate the valuable work carried out by the Mission in the reporting period, both through its headquarters as well as its broad field presence throughout Kosovo.

The EU remains strongly committed to building a peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo within Europe with full respect for the rule of law, the protection of non-Albanian communities and of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage. OMIK plays an important role in the realization of this goal. The EU therefore reiterates its full support for the Mission's respective efforts.

Given the changes in the international presence and, in particular, the reconfiguration of UNMIK, KFOR as well as of OMIK, a steady exchange of information among all international actors on the ground – including the European Union - is indispensable in the pursuit of further stabilizing the entire region. We welcome the Mission's emphasis on co-ordinating its engagement with that of other international actors to develop a complementary approach, create synergies and make best use of comparative advantages.

The EU fully supports OMIK's core mandate activities in assisting local authorities to ensure respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance. The EU would like to stress the valuable and important work done by EULEX in these areas with a focus on the fight against corruption, organized crime and war crime cases. In this context, we commend OMIK for its report giving a thorough review on War Crimes Trials from 1999 to 2009 which was issued earlier this year.

OMIK's close relationship to all ethnic communities, its longstanding expertise in building local capacities and its broad field presence give it a unique position within the international presence in Kosovo, allowing for thorough monitoring of human rights compliance at grassroots level. The EU fully supports the Mission's particular attention to non-Albanian communities' access to public services and participation in public life at central and municipal levels.

The protection of housing and property rights as well as of religious and cultural heritage is a cornerstone for the future development of Kosovo. The EU therefore supports OMIK's engagement in calling for improved conditions to enable sustainable returns. We appreciate the strong advocacy of the Mission in reaching long-term municipal land allocation for the Roma Mahalla settlement project, which is being realized with substantial EU and USAID funding.

The EU highly values the Mission's activities in the area of education, such as OMIK's assistance to the University in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, or its ambition to further develop and sustain teacher education for non-Albanian communities at the University of Prishtinë/Priština through the newly established Prizren Teachers' Centre.

We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the Mission to support independent institutions such as the Central Election Commission, the Independent Media Commission, the Independent Oversight Board or the Ombudsperson, as well as

OMIK's continued engagement to strengthen civil society to the benefit of all people living in Kosovo.

The EU is committed to assisting the economic and political development of Kosovo, in line with the European perspective of the region. Welcoming the contribution of OMIK to the EU Commission's Progress Report on Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99, the EU is looking forward to a continued fruitful cooperation with the OSCE. As for the EU, we will support OMIK in its crucial tasks both through financial contributions and seconded staff.

In concluding, we would like to thank Ambassador Almhofer and his staff for their excellent work and wish them all the best for the future.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND, 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 LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

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