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EU Response to the Address by the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for SE Europe, Dr. Erhard Busek

The European Union welcomes Dr. Busek back to the Permanent Council, following his last visit in November 2002. His visit comes at a very appropriate time, with the Stability Pact preparing to celebrate its fifth anniversary, and offers us an opportunity to underline the results achieved so far. We commend Dr. Busek and his capable and dedicated staff in their work to foster regional cooperation

The enlargement of the European Union and the accession experience of the new Member States should serve as a vital encouragement to the countries of the Western Balkans. The Stabilisation and Association process provides the framework for the eventual integration of the countries of the region into EU structures. The Union is committed to the full implementation of the Thessaloniki Agenda, which confirmed the specific complementary role of the Stability Pact in the Stabilisation and Association Process. The EU's commitment is demonstrated by making the largest aid contribution to the region, channeled through the CARDS programme.

The Stability Pact has played a crucial role in the pursuit of reforms and regional co-operation in South East European countries with an emphasis on regional ownership. The Stability Pact cooperates closely with the South East European Cooperation Process and other regional initiatives, among them the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. The network of regional free trade agreements is being completed. The Stability Pact and the European Union are working closely to strengthen the regional approach, for example in energy and transport. The Union welcomes the Stability Pact intention to continue fostering the integration of Kosovo into regional activities through enhanced cross border and cross-boundary cooperation in full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

The history of the last five years is also the history of an excellent co-operation between the Stability Pact and the OSCE at headquarters level and in the field. We recall that the Stability Pact's structure and working methods were modeled on the CSCE-OSCE process, including its three Working Tables corresponding largely to the three OSCE dimensions. This correspondence helps ensure additional

synergies. A positive outcome of this cooperation was the appointment of the Chair of the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings, Mrs. Helga Konrad, as OSCE Special Representative. The European Union believes that OSCE will benefit from her invaluable expertise and that Mrs. Konrad's appointment will assist in the fight against trafficking in Human Beings, which remains high on all our agendas.

The European Union notes that the Stability Pact's six core objectives for 2004 are also OSCE priorities, in particular local democracy, media development, and the fight against organised crime.

The European Union looks forward to the Regional Table in Portoroz, Slovenia on 7/8 June which will offer an opportunity to highlight the role of the Pact together with other international actors, including the OSCE, in their support for the region.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro align themselves with this statement.