



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1073 Vienna, 29 October 2015

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, H.E. Daniel Mitov and the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, H.E. Goran Svilanović**

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The European Union warmly welcomes Minister Daniel Mitov and Secretary General Goran Svilanović to the Permanent Council and thanks them for their addresses.

The European Union remains committed to a European perspective for the Western Balkans. We recognise, not least from our own history and experience, the key role that regional cooperation plays in promoting peace, stability and prosperity. In this context, we appreciate the strong focus of the South-East European Cooperation Process and the Regional Cooperation Council on regional cooperation in South East Europe, which is an essential part of the EU Stabilisation and Association Process. These countries have shown political will to deepen cooperation so that the whole region moves forward.

We appreciate the priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship of South-East European Cooperation Process aiming at strengthening the role of this Process as a leading political format for cooperation in the region and increasing its effectiveness in practical terms. In the context of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, the SEECP represents an important political platform and the Regional Cooperation Council a significant vehicle for efficient and targeted regional cooperation supporting and facilitating the Western Balkans' EU integration process.

The European Union welcomes the excellent cooperation between the Regional Cooperation Council and the OSCE in several areas including media freedom. We appreciate that media freedom and freedom of expression are also one of main priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship of the SEECP. We welcome the work being done by the RCC, together with the Representative on Freedom of the Media and OSCE field missions in the region to develop and implement progressive media

legislation in line with European and international standards. Migration is a topic currently high on the agenda of the European Union as well as the SEECP and the RCC due to the fact that the Western Balkan route has become the primary transit route of migratory flows from the Eastern Mediterranean to the European Union. These recent developments obviously pose significant challenges for border management and asylum systems in some Western Balkans countries. The European Union as well as individual member states have undertaken several steps to increase the Western Balkan countries' capacities to cope with this unprecedented flow of refugee and migrants, including through financial resources and technical cooperation. In this regard, the Conference on Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans Migration route on 25 October represent a tangible contribution.

One of the Regional Cooperation Council's key tasks is the implementation of the South-East Europe 2020 Strategy implementation. We welcome the focus of the RCC on the two main areas, improved connectivity and mobility, where RCC's efforts will significantly contribute to those of the European Union. In parallel with the enlargement process, the European Union has been driving forward EU integration through concrete projects. The EU's connectivity agenda strengthens integration between Western Balkan countries and the European Union as well as among themselves. In this context, we appreciate that connectivity in the sphere of transport, energy and infrastructure represents an important priority of the Bulgarian Chairmanship of the South-East European Cooperation Process.

In conclusion, we would like to congratulate Bulgaria and Minister Mitov on the assumption of the SEECP Chairmanship and we wish him every success for the future. We would also like to congratulate Mr Svilanović for the extension of his mandate until the end of 2018. Continuity of his successful work is an important element for RCC's success in the future. It will also contribute to advance cooperation between the Regional Cooperation Council and the OSCE given the personal commitment and former role of Mr Svilanović as the OSCE's Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.