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PC.DEL/593/09

16 July 2009

ENGLISH only

Swedish Presidency of the European Union

OSCE Permanent Council No. 769

Vienna 16 July 2009

EU Statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Ambassador Sergey Kapinos

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Kapinos back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU fully supports the Office's activities across all three dimensions. We are pleased that the Office continues to enjoy good cooperation with the Armenian authorities, civil society and other international actors in Armenia.

We greatly appreciate the Office's monitoring of political developments. The EU has been following these developments closely and remains keen to see political tensions resolved. To this end, the EU invites both the Armenian authorities and the opposition to engage in a constructive dialogue. We believe the Office could play an important role assisting all sides in Armenia to overcome persistent tensions. In particular we would encourage the relevant Armenian authorities to engage the Office to assist with the implementation of the recommendations in ODIHR's final election

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report.

When Ambassador Kapinos addressed the PC last year, we noted our interest in seeing an independent inquiry into the events of 1 March 2008. We are disappointed therefore that the group of experts set up to investigate these events was disbanded last month, leaving only the Ad-Hoc Parliamentary Committee to cope with the issue. The EU believes that an independent report could have helped to address the polarisation of Armenian politics. However, the recent adoption of the amnesty – with the release of the majority of the opposition activists sentenced following the 1 March 2008 events – can be considered as a first step towards a normalisation of the internal political situation.

The EU has noted before its strong support for the Office's police assistance programme. We are pleased to note that this project has made progress. But we would encourage the Office to make further work in this area a priority for the year ahead.

Madame Chair, turning to the Second Dimension, the EU welcomes the support the Office has given to the development of Aarhus centres in Armenia and to the national component of the Environment and Security Initiative. Across all three dimensions, but particularly in the Second Dimension, it is important that the Office's activities are clearly linked to the promotion of security and stability.

Concerning the Third Dimension, the EU supports the Office's efforts to engage with youth and civil society groups, its work on trafficking in human beings and its work on freedom of the media. With regard to the latter, the EU particularly welcomes the Office's support for reform of legislation on freedom of information and the

establishment of a functioning media self-regulation mechanism. The EU would also encourage the Armenian authorities to end their moratorium on the issuing of new broadcasting licences. This moratorium makes it impossible for Armenia to comply with the 17 June 2008 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights which found that denials of broadcasting licences violated Art 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Before concluding the EU would like to reiterate the importance it attaches to intensified relations with Armenia and we invite the Armenian Government to make full use of the opportunities offered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, including in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

In conclusion we value the work of the Office. It is performing an important role. We wish Ambassador Kapinos and his team well for the future and thank them for their hard work.

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

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