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EU statement in response to the address by Mr. João Soares, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Madame Chair, the EU warmly welcomes the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. João Soares, back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his presentation of the Parliamentary Assembly's main activities.

The EU fully acknowledges the valuable contribution made by the parliamentarians from all 56 OSCE participating States to our organization. We strongly support the OSCE PA's longstanding commitment to a strong engagement of civil society in all fields of OSCE activities.

The EU appreciates the OSCE PA's engagement in promoting our common OSCE commitments, notably in the area of democratic elections, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the protection of Human Rights Defenders, tolerance and non-discrimination. We also welcome a possible contribution of the OSCE PA to the ongoing "Corfu Process" on the future of European security.

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We would like to highlight the quality of the OSCE PA's intensive and constructive discussions, in particular those at the 18th Annual Session this summer in Vilnius, where we have seen the adoption of resolutions on a number of topics which the EU considers highly relevant. The debates at the Vilnius meeting reflect the positive role the OSCE parliamentarians play and the value they can add with regard to very relevant issues in the three OSCE dimensions.

Madame Chair, one of the most visible contributions of the OSCE PA to the overall work of the OSCE relates to election observation. The EU has reiterated its position on the complementary roles of the OSCE PA and the ODIHR in this common endeavour many times. We continue strongly to believe that the OSCE's elections observation is never as strong as when both institutions co-operate with each other as genuine partners, bringing their respective strengths to the table and speaking with one single voice.

In this regard, I would like to commend the OSCE PA and the ODIHR for their excellent cooperation in a series of crucial election observation missions throughout this year. We are confident that this spirit of – as MC Decision 19/06 refers to it – "common endeavour" will prevail in the mutual relations next year, starting with the Presidential elections in Ukraine, in which you, President Soares, have decided to personally lead the OSCE PA's contribution to the common OSCE endeavour.

President Soares, the EU looks forward with great interest to 2010, when Kazakhstan will be the first CIS and Central Asian country to assume the Chairmanship-in-Office of our organization. We

welcome the already intensive dialogue between Kazakhstan and various OSCE parliamentarians.

Madame Chair, in concluding, the EU would like to wish President Soares and his colleagues in the Bureau of the OSCE PA, some of whom have been newly elected this summer, as well as his staff, every success for their future work. We are looking forward to continue our close cooperation with the OSCE PA and to continue our fruitful exchange on the occasion of the forthcoming OSCE Ministerial Meeting at Athens.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA* and the 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, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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