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The Netherlands Presidency of the European Union

**12th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Sofia
7 December 2004**

Statement by the European Union

Despite lengthy negotiations and determined efforts it was - yet again - not possible to reach agreement on some key issues facing the Organisation. The EU regrets that we find ourselves in this situation and that no reference to regional issues concerning Moldova and Georgia could be agreed upon. While regrettable, by itself this is a true reflection of the lack of progress made this year in the search for solutions with regard to both regional conflicts.

On the other hand we should recognize that all Ministers did agree on a number of important issues. The European Union fully supports the statement just made by the Chairman-in-Office both where he refers to issues of agreement and to those where agreement was not possible. Throughout the consultation process the EU has made the maximum effort to help reach consensus.

The EU remains committed to the OSCE and has prepared an assessment report on the EU's role vis-à-vis the OSCE to be endorsed by the General Affairs and External Relations Council on December 13. The EU continues to be prepared to invest in the Organisation.

On the few outstanding issues the EU positions are as follows:

On Moldova, we confirm our support for the role of the OSCE and other mediators in the resolution of this conflict in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova. The EU remains ready to engage in discussions with all parties concerned on a declaration of principles concerning the stability and security of Moldova. Regarding the withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment, we exhort the Russian Federation to honour without delay the commitments made in Istanbul in 1999.

As regards Georgia, we hope that resumption of the dialogue on the conflict with regard to South Ossetia will gain further momentum through a high level meeting of the Joint Control Commission with the support of the international community, to be convened soon. We expect an early deployment of additional OSCE monitors as agreed in principle. We attach great importance to a continued, albeit reduced, Border Monitoring Operation. On Abkhazia, we remain convinced that a peaceful

solution through the UN-led process should be pursued on the basis of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. In accordance with the 1999 Istanbul commitments, we reaffirm the need to reach an early agreement between the parties on the duration and modalities of the functioning of the Russian military bases.

The European Union congratulates all parties concerned in Ukraine that they are working their way out of a complicated and politically tense situation in a peaceful and constructive atmosphere. The re-run of the second round of Presidential elections is planned for December 26. It continues to be of the utmost importance to ensure the integrity of the election process. The EU urges all OSCE participating States to heed the call of ODIHR to send election observers and to make available the necessary resources. The EU stands ready to contribute its share. The events since November 21 have, for the EU, underlined the relevance of the Helsinki principles and the OSCE acquis to which we are all committed. The EU deplors very much that it has not been possible to adopt a joint declaration at this Ministerial Council on the situation in Ukraine. This is even more deplorable given the fact that the text of such a declaration was supported by the government of Ukraine. Mr Chairman, the efforts of the EU continue to be directed at helping to find a way out of this crisis in a non-violent manner, while ensuring that democratic principles prevail, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine is preserved and the will of the Ukrainian people is reflected.

Free and fair elections, in which the electorate has confidence, are vital to the development and consolidation of democracy in every country in the OSCE region. In this respect the EU expresses its strong support for the election related activities of the OSCE/ODIHR, as conducted in accordance with the provisions of the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

Looking to the future, the EU is interested in an early establishment of a Panel of Eminent Persons, which is to address the need for strengthening the effectiveness of the Organisation. We look forward to a creative and constructive discussion on its recommendations by the middle of next year.

The EU urges participating States to do their utmost to come to a resolution of the scales issue before the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the statement be attached to the Journal of the day.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement.

¹Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process