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EU Statement for the Working Session 12: Humanitarian Issues and other commitments II

2nd October, Warsaw

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the views and actions of the European Union in the fight against trafficking in human beings, which we consider a serious threat not only to individuals but also to society in its entirety. In addition, human trafficking affects the enjoyment of human rights in a very fundamental way.

The OSCE structures and Institutions involved in fighting this phenomenon deserve praise for consistently keeping the focus on it along the years, promoting co-ordinated efforts by the participating States and the international community, along the lines set by the 2003 OSCE Action Plan and further MC Decisions. We reaffirm our ongoing interest in the partnership among relevant international actors under the heading of "Alliance against Trafficking in Persons".

We take this opportunity to congratulate the Special Representative Ms. Eva Biaudet for the success of the latest event in the framework of the Alliance, the Conference "Assistance to Trafficked Persons: We Can Do Better", held last month in Vienna. Since her appointment, she has shown commendable energy in carrying on the excellent work done by her predecessor and giving OSCE action a renewed impulse. The priorities set for her work-plan (establishing national monitoring mechanisms, countering trafficking for

labour exploitation, addressing child trafficking and improving knowledge, understanding and gathering of data on the phenomenon) respond to real needs.

Mr Chairman,

The fight against trafficking in human beings is among the EU key priorities in strengthening Justice, Freedom and Security, as proved by the adoption, in December 2005, of the “EU Action Plan on Best Practices, Standards, Procedures for Combating and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings” and by the political debate on the problem held in the European Council of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs. Consistent with the OSCE Action Plan, and in synergy with it, the EU Action Plan, which has been reviewed and updated at the end of 2006, provides a balanced and coherent framework that encompasses the three cornerstones of an effective strategy aimed at tackling the phenomenon: prevention of trafficking, protection of victims, and strong prosecution of criminals. Further action in the fight against trafficking is reflected in Communication of the European Commission of June 2006, proposing a comprehensive EU strategy aimed at the promotion and safeguard the rights of the child in the European Union's internal and external policies and to support Member States' efforts in this field.

As for legislative action taken in the specific field of tackling the exploitation of illegal labour, to which trafficking in persons is often linked, on May 16th 2007 the European Commission submitted to the Council and the European Parliament a Proposal for a Directive envisaging sanctions against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals, thus addressing the need, which is at the core of the EU Action Plan, to fight the demand of trafficked persons and creating a significant intersection between migration and anti-trafficking policies.

The EU strategy against trafficking in human beings not only consists of policy and legislative instruments, but also offers, through various programmes funded by the European Commission, a number of concrete tools for a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to the prevention and the fight against trafficking in persons and to other issues (gender equality and migration) which are often linked to it. Let's mention them briefly:

- AGIS framework programme, promoting police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters in EU member States and candidate countries, has been replaced by the programme “Prevention of and Fight against Crime”, providing financial support to activities regarding all types of crime, included trafficking in persons.
- EQUAL programme, targeting discrimination and inequality in the labour market, has been completed with the activities celebrating the “2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All”.
- DAPHNE programme aims at supporting public authorities and civil society to develop measures and actions to prevent or to combat all forms of violence against children and women, including trafficking.
- AENEAS and its follow-up programme for the period 2007-2013 provide specific and complementary financial and technical assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum.

Mr Chairman,

Looking beyond its borders, the EU is strongly committed to strengthening international efforts in this field by seeking synergies with other international Organizations, such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the ILO, the UN and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. The EU emphasizes the importance of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Being and the EU MSs are committed to its ratification and implementation.

With the OSCE structures and Institutions we have established during the years a thorough and effective cooperation. We work together within the framework of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons and we successfully co-operate in reviewing and updating the OSCE/ODIHR National Referral Mechanisms Handbook. OSCE Missions regularly share know-how and co-operate with the Union, in implementing EU funded anti-trafficking projects towards third countries (e.g. TACIS programme in the Caucasus or CARDS programme in the Balkans).

The Action Plans agreed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, are important tools for promoting the

implementation of the main international instruments, including the OSCE Action Plan for those countries which are participating States, and the enhancement of the co-operation within the relevant international organizations. The European Strategy for Central Asia, approved last June, includes trafficking in human beings among the challenges for the region and establishes greater support to the fight against it, including in updating the legal framework.

While much is being done, there is still a lot to do in order to enhance international judicial co-operation, co-ordination and information exchange with third countries, as recommended last year in Brussels by MC Decisions no. 5/06 on Organised Crime.

The importance given by the EU to the concrete implementation of European and national strategies aimed at combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims is highlighted this year by the launching, scheduled for the 18th October, of the annual European Day on Anti-Trafficking. This year it will be marked by an event devoted to “Trafficking in Human Beings: Time for Action” and will draw the attention of public opinions to this most serious violation of human rights so as to give momentum to the ongoing national and EU efforts against it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia^{*}, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

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