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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 924
Vienna, 20 September 2012**

**EU statement in response to the Deputy Foreign Minister of
Georgia, H.E. Sergi Kapanadze**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Sergi Kapanadze, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address.

The European Union is committed to further deepening its relations with Georgia. We are committed to continue working towards a new Association Agreement, including on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Important steps have also been made towards EU visa liberalisation and an EU expert mission to Tbilisi is under way this week. We aim at presenting a Visa Liberalisation Action Plan for Georgia. We also wish to highlight that the EU has intensified its support to Georgia through additional assistance, including under the new Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation Programme.

The European Union welcomes the progress made by Georgia in its modernisation and reform efforts in recent years and stresses the importance of continuing on this path, guided by the values of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. The parliamentary elections to be held on 1 October will be an important indicator of the progress achieved and will be crucial for the continued democratic development of Georgia, as well as for the quality and intensity of its future relations with the EU.

We welcome that the electoral legislative framework in Georgia has undergone significant amendments in the past year, following recommendations by the ODIHR, the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). We stress the importance of fully implementing all of these recommendations.

We note the concerns expressed in the Interim Report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission with regard to the inequalities in the size of electoral districts, the polarisation of the campaign environment, and on party and campaign financing.

We also take note of concerns regarding the misuse of administrative resources and of campaign funds, as well as alleged intimidation of supporters of opposition parties.

We call on the government, as well as the opposition, to ensure a peaceful electoral environment where citizens can vote on the basis of policy choices in a way that maintains confidence in the fairness of the electoral process and the prevalence of the rule of law. We underline the importance of the swift implementation of the “*must carry/must offer*” rule in the regulations governing the activities of cable operators during the election campaign, which were adopted in July, and express support for the intention to encourage implementation of this rule beyond the election date.

The European Union reiterates the importance of the upcoming elections meeting international standards and being conducted in an environment of media freedom and pluralism, fair competition, genuine participation and transparency. This would also help enhance the legitimacy of the electoral process. The EU reiterates the importance of international election observation missions, in particular by the OSCE/ODIHR.

We also take this opportunity to reiterate our strong support for the Geneva Discussions and the effective functioning of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs). The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) plays a leading role in the IPRM’s within its stabilisation, normalisation and confidence-building mandate. The EU calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and the implementing Measures of 8 September 2008, including by providing access to EUMM to the breakaway regions. The EU also continues to fully support the OSCE water projects on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line, as they address humanitarian issues and aim to build trust and confidence. We also call for renewed efforts to reconnect the Akhagori region to natural gas deliveries. This would be a meaningful step for confidence building. The EU remains convinced of the urgent need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia.

The EU wishes to recall, once more, its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The EU reiterates once again the importance it attaches to intensified relations with Georgia and invites the Georgian government to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The EU has noted with shock the recent reports of abuse and torture of prisoners in Georgian prisons. It has also noted the statements made on 19 September by the President and Prime Minister of Georgia. It is of vital importance that these and other incidents are thoroughly and transparently investigated and that those responsible are held to account.

Finally, we express our appreciation to H.E. Sergi Kapanadze, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, for his presence at the Permanent Council today and wish him well in his future endeavours.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.