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**EU RESPONSE TO THE SPEECH BY SPECIAL CO-ORDINATOR OF THE STABILITY PACT
FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE DR. ERHARD BUSEK**

The European Union welcomes Dr. Erhard Busek back to the Permanent Council, following his last visit in May 2004, and thanks him for the update on the activities of the Stability Pact and its plans for the near future.

The EU continues to strongly support the Stability Pact through the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and through considerable donor contributions.

Regional co-operation constitutes an essential element of the SAP. The EU is pleased that the Stability Pact has strengthened its mutually reinforcing relationship with the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) and with a number of other regional initiatives. The Stability Pact has always been working to facilitate regional co-operation as a means to deal with shared problems and to achieve further progress. In this regard, the EU takes positive note of recent joint commitments by the South Eastern European states to fight corruption, to integrate their energy markets, to draft a single free trade agreement and to cooperate in defense conversion programmes. The European Union looks forward to their early implementation.

The participation of Moldova in the framework of the Stability Pact gives its government an opportunity to benefit from regional cooperation and to get support regarding the implementation of the EU Action Plan.

Dr. Busek should also be commended for his efforts to promote co-operation of the governments concerned with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The EU shares the opinion of the Special Coordinator that the time is ripe for the states in the region to take more responsibility for their own cooperation and supports his focus on the question of regional ownership. In this context, we look forward to the upcoming Regional Table

in Prague that will offer an opportunity to discuss concrete measures on how to achieve this aim. Regional ownership and progressive EU integration are mutually reinforcing objectives that should move forward in parallel.

Owing to their multidimensional and complementary character, the Stability Pact and the OSCE work together efficiently as natural partners for co-operation. The EU encourages this interaction both at the headquarters level and in the field.

Last but not least, the EU would like to commend Dr. Busek and his team for their dedicated work in enhancing co-operation in the South Eastern Europe and to wish them all success in their future endeavours.

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

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