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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1265th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

30 April 2020

In response to the statement by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Claus Neukirch

The European Union welcomes the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Claus Neukirch, and thanks him for his report to the Permanent Council. The challenges posed by COVID-19 emerge clearly from that report, and we wish first and foremost to thank the Mission for pursuing its work in conditions that are now even more difficult.

We support a peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, and with a special status for Transdniestria.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, full co-operation between the Government of Moldova and the authorities in Tiraspol is more necessary than ever in order to protect the health of the people living on both sides of the Dniester, who are affected in equal measure by the coronavirus. Complete transparency regarding the public health situation is required to combat COVID-19. We therefore fervently hope that a meeting of the Working Group on Healthcare and a World Health Organization visit to Transdniestria can both take place soon. We note with concern that the requirement for residents of the left bank who work on the right bank to self-isolate at home for 14 days after returning from Transdniestria creates numerous problems that impede freedom of movement and have an impact on the economy and certain local health services. We support the Mission's efforts to resolve those difficulties.

We support the convocation – as soon as all the necessary conditions have been met – of a meeting of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdniestrian Settlement in the “5+2” format, which is the only mechanism for achieving a comprehensive and sustainable resolution of the conflict. We regret that the draft text of the “Bratislava protocol” that was negotiated at the end of last year could not be adopted. On the other hand, we welcome the Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the “5+2” Format that was issued in Bratislava on 6 December 2019.

Full implementation of the “package of eight” measures remains essential. With regard to the telecommunications sector, we continue to exhort the Moldovan authorities to intensify the dialogue with the private operators concerned with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution. We also note the positive developments regarding the situation of Latin-script schools in the Transdniestrian region. We believe that additional measures are necessary to ensure their normal and sustainable operation.

We expect tangible progress to be achieved in the three “baskets” of the agenda agreed for the negotiation progress, in particular on the political, institutional and security issues of the third basket. We stress the importance for the authorities to finalize their shared vision for the settlement of the conflict. We take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting as the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, and assure him of our support for his efforts towards a settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict.

Owing to the high risk posed by weapons and ammunition depots, particularly by the one at Cobasna, we have taken good note of the statements by the Russian Federation announcing its intention to destroy the ammunition from this depot. We recall that the OSCE has the mandate and means to contribute to the removal and destruction of the Russian munitions and armaments from Transdnestria, and its involvement is essential to the transparency and international verification of these operations.

We note that, in the last quarter of 2019, the OSCE Mission observed five convoys of Russian military vehicles moving between Ribnița and Tiraspol that were marked with explosive hazard signs, but it was unable to determine the load of these trucks. We invite the Russian Federation to share information on these movements with us.

As indicated during the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova with regard to the Operational Group of Russian Forces, we recall the importance of completing the processes started as part of the commitments made at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999.

We call on the Mission to continue to monitor the situation in the Security Zone and to report regularly on incidents there. We reiterate our appeal for strict adherence to the rules established by the Joint Control Commission in the Security Zone.

The EU stands ready to support the Moldovan Government in the implementation of the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia, in order to strengthen the institutional functioning of this region within the Republic of Moldova. We welcome the Moldovan Parliament’s decision to re-establish a working group aimed at ensuring the functionality of the autonomy in Gagauzia and harmonizing national and local legislation.

Finally, the European Commission has announced a substantial aid package for the Republic of Moldova to support the country’s efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. This package represents a continuation of the assistance that the EU has been providing to the Republic of Moldova for many years under, variously, the Eastern Partnership, the Association Agreement, the Free Trade Agreement and the EU Confidence Building Measures Programme, which is aimed at increasing trust between people on both sides of the Dniester. The EU will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Republic of Moldova.

The candidate countries North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

1 North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.