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EU in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Jose- Luis Herrero Ansola

The EU welcomes Ambassador Jose-Luis Herrero to the Permanent Council, for the first time in his capacity as the Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU welcomes the progress the Host Country has made in a number of key areas, in particular judicial and police reform, as well as the implementation of obligations arising from the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. It encourages the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to improve the dialogue between the major political players so as to allow the normal functioning of institutions and accelerate the pace of reforms. Actions and statements which could negatively impact on good neighbourly relations should be avoided. The EU recalls, in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council on 19 and 20 June 2008, that maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, remains essential. The EU recalls that further steps by the former

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Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in its progress towards the EU will be possible as soon as the conditions set out in the December 2005 European Council conclusions, the Copenhagen political criteria and the outstanding key priorities of the accession partnership are fulfilled.

The EU recalls the GAERC Conclusions of 8 and 9 December 2008, that the elections to be held in 2009 should be free and fair. In this regard, the EU welcomed the peaceful and orderly conduct of the 2009 Presidential elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It noted with satisfaction the final assessment by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission that the elections were organized fairly and met most international commitments and standards.

The EU praises the active engagement of the Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje with stakeholders countrywide before each round of voting. In this context we encourage Ambassador Herrero to work with the government, political parties and the State Electoral Commission (SEC) to help determine and implement ways to strengthen electoral management so that several weaknesses that were identified in the ODIHR Final Report are addressed in an efficient way.

We note with satisfaction the Mission's perception that the process of stabilization has continued to evolve in a positive way, although risk-factors have not completely disappeared. In this context, we would like to commend the monitoring and confidence building activities of the Mission, which continues to play an important role, not only in assessing the situation on the ground, generating

confidence among the different political parties and ethnic communities, but also as an early warning mechanism.

The EU fully shares the emphasis put by the OSCE Mission on Promoting Rule of Law in the country. In this spirit, it applauds the Mission's valuable and multifaceted support, inter alia, for the adoption of laws designed to reform the judiciary, as well as for the enhancement of the work of the Ombudsman. The EU also commends the Mission for its comprehensive training program to improve judicial capacity to handle returned ICTY, organized crime and complex corruption cases more efficiently and effectively. We support the readiness of the Mission to assist the authorities of the country in making further progress on judicial issues, through developing a track record of implementation of the recent reforms and strengthening the independence of the judiciary.

Of great importance is also the contribution of the Mission to the Police Development through joint efforts with the Ministry of Interior. The EU commends the Mission's willingness to support the Host Country's fight against national and trans-national organised crime and to assist the Government's efforts to develop an effective, independent Police Service. The EU welcomes the adoption last week of the Law on Internal Affairs. We would also like to note that, while implementation of police reform continues to make progress, equitable representation across the public administration, including at senior levels, needs to be strengthened.

The EU also appreciates the Mission's work in promoting good governance, in particular its efforts focused on the development of professional government structures, including through the depoliticisation of the civil service at all levels, the implementation of

democratic procedures, the further improvement of the process of decentralization in the education system and the integration of all ethnic groups of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The EU stands ready to support the Mission in its efforts to develop a transparent and efficient public administration free from political influences.

The EU appreciates the fact that the Mission has set as one of its priorities the Monitoring and Confidence Building and, in this respect, notes the wide range of Mission activities related to conflict prevention and confidence in the Host Country.

In conclusion we would like to assure Ambassador Jose-Luis Herrero Ansola and his team of our continued support and wish them success in their important work.

The candidate countries TURKEY and CROATIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.