

Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**(Special) Meeting of the Permanent Council No. 632
25 October 2006**

**EU Statement in Response to H.E. Mr. Zurab Nogaideli,
Prime Minister of Georgia**

The European Union warmly welcomes Prime Minister Nogaideli to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his presentation.

The EU has enhanced its relationship with Georgia in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Within this framework a joint statement was signed on 2 October regarding the text of the Georgia-European Union Action Plan, which will be formally approved at the EU-Georgia Cooperation Council session planned for 14 November in Brussels. The importance the European Union attaches to its relations with Georgia is also reflected in the high number of recent visits by EU and European officials to the country. EU Special Representative Semneby and his team, in close coordination with the EU Heads of Mission in Tbilisi, are in constant contact with the Georgian authorities in order to facilitate intensive and trustful communication between Georgia and the EU.

The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and supports all efforts for peaceful settlement of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts. The peaceful resolution of these conflicts is of vital importance for the future of the whole region. The EU welcomes Georgia's commitment to secure a peaceful resolution of the conflicts and stands ready to do its part in promoting this process and calls on others to do the same.

The EU is the largest contributor to the economic reconstruction programme in South Ossetia. The EU considers those rehabilitation activities not only important from an economical and environmental point of view, but also because they contribute to stability and are helpful in maintaining the dialogue and cooperation between parties involved. The EU is therefore pleased that the first Steering Committee meeting on 6 October was successful. The EU encourages the OSCE and donors to implement the proposed projects soon.

The European Union is disappointed that the Joint Control Commission meeting on 12 and 13 October in Vladikavkaz did not produce any results. The European Union calls on the parties to undertake confidence-building measures in and around the conflict regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and focus on reaching a peaceful resolution of the conflicts fully respecting Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The importance of such efforts is emphasized by the recent shooting incident that took place on 25 October in the Kodori Gorge and the landmine explosion in South Ossetia yesterday. The EU calls upon the parties to comply fully with previous agreements and understandings regarding these conflicts, in compliance with UN Security Council resolution 1716.

The EU reiterates its willingness to facilitate mutual confidence building and contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. In order to promote the effectiveness of confidence-building measures in South Ossetia, the EU proposes as a first step an increase in the number of OSCE military observers in the conflict zone. More OSCE military observers, working with the Joint Peacekeeping Force,

should help to reduce tensions, allay fears, aid transparency and build confidence. They should also help maintain the right conditions for the implementation of the much-needed economic rehabilitation projects.

The European Union reiterates its grave concern about the recent escalation of tension in Georgian-Russian Federation relations. Referring to the GAERC Conclusions 16-17 October on Georgia the EU emphasises the importance of toning down public rhetoric and calls upon both sides to reopen normal diplomatic dialogue in order to work towards a normalisation of relations. The EU expresses grave concern at the continuing economic, political and humanitarian consequences of the measures taken by Russia against Georgia. We urge the Russian Federation not to pursue measures targeting Georgians in the Russian Federation.

We reiterate our support to the ongoing democratic reforms in Georgia and encourage the authorities to continue their efforts in this regard.

Finally, let me reiterate the wish of the EU to work closely with all parties in promoting prosperity and stability in the Southern Caucasus and deepen our relationship with Georgia within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia ¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, as well as the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process