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Vienna, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011**

**EU statement in response to the address by the Minister of  
Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, H.E. Edward  
Nalbandian**

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The EU welcomes H.E. Edward Nalbandian to the Permanent Council today and thanks him for his address.

The EU has made clear its wish to broaden and strengthen its relations with Armenia and the other two countries in the South Caucasus. In this context, we welcome President Sargsyan's statement of 18 December committing Armenia to adopting European standards in the areas of democracy, political dialogue and economic development. All Armenian institutions should take this commitment fully on board and ensure its swift implementation.

Through the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, the EU will continue to provide support to Armenia to implement necessary political and economic reforms, and is convinced that a future Association Agreement will draw Armenia and the EU even closer together.

Mr Chairperson,

Progress on economic reforms and tackling corruption remain priorities that should be actively pursued. The release of some of the prisoners detained

following the events of 1 March 2008 was a positive step and we stress the importance of the early release of all remaining prisoners.

We note some improvements to the freedom of assembly. Political parties are now able to hold rallies on a frequent basis, but are subject to restrictive conditions. And whilst we have observed some improvements in the media code, media pluralism, especially in the broadcast media, remains a concern. It is important that the working group currently looking at the code fully takes into account the recommendations put forward by OSCE experts, including the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Council of Europe.

With Armenia due to begin a new cycle of elections in 2012, all these issues, in particular freedom of the media and freedom of assembly, become ever more important.

The OSCE Office in Yerevan does some important work supporting the ongoing process of reform in Armenia and has our full support. In particular we welcome their police support programme. The Office's work on judicial reform complements the considerable assistance that the EU, as well as individual EU Member States, provide in this area. The Office's decision to make assistance to the upcoming elections a priority for the year ahead is to be welcomed.

Mr Chairperson,

Turning now to the situation in Nagorno Karabakh, the EU is seriously concerned about the tension and reports of rising number of incidents along the Line of Contact and calls upon parties to exercise restraint both on the ground and in their public statements. We fully support the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-chairs in the search for a peaceful and negotiated settlement. The European Union welcomes the joint statement made by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries and the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia on December 1, 2010 in Astana. The European Union reiterates its support for all the proposals, without exception, of the Presidents of the French Republic, the

United States of America and the Russian Federation in their joint declarations in L'Aquila in 2009 and in Muskoka in 2010. We urge the Presidents of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to engage constructively when they meet President Medvedev in Sochi this coming weekend. We hope that both sides can make the difficult concessions necessary to move the process forward. As the ambassadors of the Minsk Group Co-chair countries said recently in the Permanent Council, we have reached the moment of truth. It is time to adopt the Basic Principles for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, not to make further amendments.

Mr Chairperson,

Finally a word briefly on the Armenia/Turkey normalisation process. The EU is convinced that the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey, without preconditions, is in the best interest of both countries and the whole region. We are disappointed therefore that the process has been suspended. We urge both sides to take the necessary steps to unblock and conclude the process as foreseen in the Protocols signed in 2009.

In conclusion, we would like to thank H.E. Edward Nalbandian for his address to the Permanent Council today.

The candidate countries CROATIA\*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ICELAND\*\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA and BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, the European Free Trade Association country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

\*\*Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.