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**EU Statement in response to the Prime Minister of Georgia,
H.E. Zurab Noghaideli**

The European Union welcomes the Prime Minister of Georgia, H.E. Zurab Noghaideli, to this special meeting of the Permanent Council. The EU appreciates this opportunity to exchange views on the situation in Georgia with the Prime Minister, as many developments are taking place which have the particular attention of the EU.

As was elaborated in the Permanent Council of 13 October, recent incidents in the zone of conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia, have led to increased concern about the fragile security situation in the area. The EU on many occasions urged all sides to continue active cooperation in the interest of a political settlement of the conflict, exclusively by peaceful means, based on a respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia.

In this context, the EU has listened with great interest to the elaborations by Prime Minister Noghaideli on the initiatives by President Saakashvili, aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia. The EU reiterates its hope that these initiatives will provide new impetus to the peace process and welcomes the resumption of dialogue between the sides earlier this week.

The EU underlines that full implementation of the demilitarisation agreements, which were reached between the sides previously, remains a crucial element of the peace process and calls upon the sides to proceed with full demilitarisation without delay.

The EU welcomes the intention of the Georgian government to implement economic rehabilitation projects in the region, as indeed economic rehabilitation can help to restore mutual trust and create more favourable conditions for a constructive political dialogue. In this respect, the EU recalls the contribution of 2.5 million euros which it has made available for such projects. The EU will analyse the outcome of the upcoming Economic Needs Assessment programme, as it considers the possibility of further support in the zone of conflict.

As the EU underlined after the Batumi conference in July 2005, the EU believes that respect for democratic values, the rule of law and human rights constitutes a significant prerequisite for a viable, peaceful and durable settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts. Therefore the EU reiterates its readiness to support further political, economic and administrative reforms in Georgia.

The EU regards the agreement reached in May this year between the Russian Federation and Georgia on the withdrawal of remaining Russian military bases from the territory of Georgia as an important step towards fulfilment of undertakings entered into in Istanbul in 1999. The EU welcomes progress achieved and hopes that both sides will continue to take all necessary measures to implement the obligations stipulated in the joint declaration by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Ukraine and Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

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