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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 985
Vienna, 27 February 2014**

**EU Statement in Response to the Address by the
Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe,
Mr Nils Muižnieks**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr Nils Muižnieks, to the Permanent Council this morning. Democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are values at the heart of the European Union and central to the work of the OSCE and Council of Europe. It is important that there is a continuous dialogue taking place between us and we appreciate this further opportunity to consider how we can work more closely together.

In your presentation you have highlighted a range of important human rights challenges facing our region and we share many of the concerns you have outlined. We must not shy away from our shortcomings in realising the full enjoyment of all human rights by our citizens. It is imperative that we all implement the human rights commitments which we as States have signed up to in their entirety. Whether they are legal or political commitments agreed upon in the Council of Europe, and in the OSCE, we all have an obligation to deliver on them.

The European Union commends Commissioner Muižnieks for his work in protecting and promoting human rights. The concerns expressed by the Commissioner on various areas of human rights are very often shared by the European Union. Both the Council of Europe and the OSCE have vast expertise on human rights issues, which we encourage all States to utilise. We view the work of both organisations as mutually re-enforcing, and we welcome and encourage the ongoing cooperation that exists. We value the established joint work in a number of areas, including questions concerning the fight against terrorism, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including Roma and Sinti and combating trafficking in human beings. The joint Council of Europe-OSCE conference held earlier this month on 'Combating

Trafficking in Human Beings' was the most recent of many examples of useful initiatives on important human rights issues, and we commend the Swiss and Austrian Chairmanships for organising this.

The European Union supports the focus the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship has placed on improving cooperation between international and regional organisations. We are encouraged to hear from you of the many different contacts and good cooperation that exists between your office and the OSCE Institutions and Field Operations. We believe there is great scope to deepen the cooperation between our organisations and add value, drawing on areas where joint initiatives have already proved productive. These include on freedom of the media, freedom of religion and belief, human rights education, improving the situation of Roma and Sinti, and combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We hope that efforts of the Swiss Chairmanship in improving cooperation between the OSCE and other international actors, as well as our broader discussions in the context of the OSCE's Helsinki+40 debate, will result in greater synergy between our organisations at the political and strategic level, a more regular and systematic exchange of views, and further opportunities for the involvement of Council of Europe representatives in relevant OSCE meetings.

Finally, we have paid careful attention to your reporting on the current human rights situation in Ukraine. The European Union shares your concerns and our support for the Council of Europe International Advisory Panel has been repeatedly stated. We would be interested to hear your views on where you believe the OSCE and the Council of Europe can work together in assisting Ukraine in resolving the political and human rights challenges it is facing.

On this final issue, as well as in the many other areas already mentioned, we look forward to fruitful cooperation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE. We want to thank you again for addressing us this morning and want to wish you every success in the important work that you are pursuing. Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN member of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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

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