

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**Permanent Council No. 603
30 March 2006****Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the parliamentary elections in Ukraine of 29 March 2006**

1. The European Union takes positive note of the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR-led International Elections Observation Mission to the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada elections of 26 March 2006. The Mission concluded that the elections were free and fair, consolidating the democratic breakthrough in Ukraine.
2. The European Union welcomes these elections which stand as testimony to Ukraine's commitment to a truly democratic process. They provided the population with the opportunity to make an informed choice between distinct alternatives and to freely and fairly express their will at the ballot box. The Ukrainian people have assumed ownership of their democracy. This is a milestone in the democratic election process which began with the political events around the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential elections. The Rada elections in Ukraine set a new and very welcome standard for elections in the region as a whole.
3. However, the European Union also takes note of the limited number of mainly technical shortcomings identified by the election observation mission. It calls upon the relevant Ukrainian authorities to take corrective action and to ensure that such problems will not re-emerge in future elections.

4. The European Union looks forward to continued work on deepening its partnership with Ukraine. This partnership builds on shared values expressed in the quality of Ukraine's democracy and reforms. The elections and the subsequent formation of a new government will provide a strong basis for renewed efforts to move forward in key reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law, the transformation of society and strengthening market economy, including crucially important steps enabling Ukraine to gain early membership in the World Trade Organisation. The European Union stands ready to assist Ukraine in its reforms.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.