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Irish Presidency of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 497
26 February 2004**

EU Statement in Response to Address by H.E. Mr. Kastriot ISLAMI Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania

The EU is very pleased to welcome Minister Islami to the PC, the third Ministerial appearance from the region before this body in recent weeks. We share his assessment that this demonstrates how ever-better neighbourly relations have transformed South Eastern Europe into a region of enhanced cooperation and stability

Minister, we appreciate your reiteration of full support for the work of the OSCE Presence in Albania, whose new mandate is a firm basis for its continued role. We also wish to welcome Ambassadors Lipponen and Salzmann and to congratulate them for their very useful work.

Albania has made significant progress in certain areas in recent years and the EU has been happy to recognize this both in Brussels and here in Vienna. We welcome your Government's determination and political will in carrying out fast and qualitative reforms with a view to the country's European integration, since only visible progress in the reform agenda will lead to progress in the Stabilisation and Association process. In this context, the EU attaches importance to the proper functioning of democracy, and to full respect for Human and Minority Rights.

Efforts in combating organised crime, corruption and trafficking in goods and human beings need to be sustained. We look forward to the reform of the legal sector so that the promised robust crackdown on these evils may have a lasting impact. We accordingly welcome the comprehensive Legal Sector Report and we note with satisfaction that the Presence's proposals for assistance largely coincide with the Albanian authorities' own priorities in this area.

We recognise the positive role that your country has played in the region over the past years and its strong engagement in furthering regional cooperation.

With regard to the demonstrations last Saturday we trust that the responsible attitude displayed on this occasion will provide a basis for better consensual work in Parliament, which may translate into a rapid approval and implementation of

the property restitution bill and fresh work on the electoral reform package. It is important that this approach is quickly extended to the areas listed in the reports by Ambassadors Lipponen and Salzmänn such as fighting organized crime and corruption, strengthening of the judicial system and the public administration.

The EU welcomes the recent successful workshop on border management and encourages the active participation of Albanian representatives in future events. We welcome the offer to host a similar event in Albania.

Finally, Minister, the EU looks forward to continued close cooperation between the Albanian Authorities and the OSCE Presence in Albania, together with the Delegation of the European Commission.

The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia and the Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this statement.