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## **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1119th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 November 2016

### **In response to the report by Ambassador Michael Scanlan, Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova**

The European Union welcomes Ambassador Scanlan and thanks him for his fifth report to the Permanent Council.

We should like first to comment on the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova on 30 October and 13 November. According to the preliminary conclusions by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) election observation mission, the elections were pluralistic and respected fundamental freedoms. In general, the technical preparations for the second round were conducted in a professional manner, and the observers reported positively on the procedures on the day of the election. At the same time, there was an imbalance in the media coverage, and harsh and intolerant words were spoken. A lack of transparency in the campaign financing and the misuse of administrative resources were noted. Citizens living abroad and those in the interior of the country were unable to vote because of the insufficient number of ballot papers available to them. The shortcomings identified by the election observation mission need to be remedied for future elections with account taken of the ODIHR recommendations.

I should like now to comment on Ambassador Scanlan's report. As you know, the European Union is in favour of a peaceful and comprehensive settlement to the Transdniestrian conflict respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova with a special status for the Transdniestrian region. In that regard, we welcome the resumption of negotiations in the "5+2" format on 2 and 3 June in Berlin. After a break in negotiations of two years, this meeting of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdniestrian Settlement has given new stimulus. We particularly welcome the unanimous agreement of the mediators and observers on the need to arrive at a settlement of the conflict and on their determination to make progress towards it.

The European Union calls for tangible progress in the three baskets, particularly the political, institutional and security aspects of the third basket. At the same time, it calls for the full implementation of the Berlin Protocol, given the need to record tangible progress in various key issues, including the participation in international road traffic of vehicles registered in the Transdniestrian region, recognition of diplomas issued by universities in the Transdniestrian region, telecommunications, the environment and criminal affairs.

Like you, we cherish the hope that 2017 – a year in which no elections are scheduled – will see progress in the settlement of the conflict. In that regard, the initiative by the Republic of Moldova to draft a document on the special status of the Transnistrian region early next year is a major step forward that we fully support.

We also support the holding of regular meetings by the chief mediators of the parties (“1+1” format) and by the working groups. We are also in favour of the adoption of a ministerial declaration in Hamburg on negotiations on the Transnistrian settlement process in the “5+2” format.

The continuation and conclusion of discussions would be of specific benefit to the daily life of the population of the Republic of Moldova, including the Transnistrian region. The obstacles to free movement, particularly free access by farmers to their properties in the Transnistrian region, are important issues that need to be addressed. The same applies to incidents in the security zone and to the withdrawal of the remaining units of the Russian army from the Republic of Moldova.

We also condemn all military activity in the security zone that is not strictly sanctioned by decisions of the Joint Control Commission.

In order to fulfil their mandate in its entirety and to contribute effectively to the creation of the necessary conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, the members of the Mission require full and unhindered access to the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova, including the Transnistrian region. We note the improvement in the situation and hope, like you, that this priority matter will be resolved in 2017.

The European Union continues to pay particular attention to schools teaching in the Latin alphabet in the Transnistrian region and supports the continued involvement by the Mission so as to enable it to contribute further to ensuring their normal and sustainable functioning.

The European Union particularly welcomes the Mission’s work in the human dimension, especially its efforts to stimulate the development of independent and pluralistic media. We are committed to the full guarantee of freedom of expression and information through respect for pluralism of the media and combating the formation of monopolies. We also warmly welcome the activities to support civil society and young persons and to foster greater participation by women in political life. We welcome the adoption of an action plan on gender by the Mission and its future implementation.

We salute the Mission’s efforts to facilitate the work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) with a view to the adoption of a government strategy for the full integration of members of national minorities. The European Union attaches great importance to the adoption and implementation of this strategy in accordance with the HCNM guidelines.

On that subject, we share your satisfaction at the functioning of the dialogue mechanism between the Parliament in Chişinău and the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia. We welcome the introduction of amendments to the Moldovan legislation that, if adopted, would confirm Gagauzia’s status as an autonomous territory.

The European Union welcomes the support given by you and your team to the efforts by the Republic of Moldova to promote a spirit of tolerance, humanity and mutual respect through the commemoration of the Holocaust and education on that subject. We welcome the adoption by Parliament of the July Declaration on the Acceptance of the Final Report of the Elie Wiesel International Commission on the Holocaust. The European Union looks forward with interest to the government action plan.

In conclusion, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to strengthening its political association and economic integration with the Republic of Moldova within the framework of the Association Agreement, which entered into force fully on 1 July 2016.

Finally, we should like to express our very positive appreciation for the work carried out by the Mission and its key role in ensuring the region's stability and prosperity. We should also like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, Ambassador Meier-Klodt, for his high level of commitment to the settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict in the past year and to wish the Austrian Chairmanship's designated successor Ambassador Wolf Dietrich Heim every success.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>1</sup> and Albania<sup>1</sup>, the Stabilisation and Association Process country and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

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<sup>1</sup> The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.