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Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 587
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EU response to the address by the Chairman-in-Office on the priorities of the Belgian Chairmanship - 12 January 2006

1. The European Union welcomes Minister De Gucht to the Permanent Council for the first time as Chairman in Office and thanks him for his address on the priorities of the Belgian Chair for the forthcoming year. We wish him well and look forward to working with him and his delegation in the challenging months ahead.
2. The EU welcomes the intention of the Belgian Chair to build on the excellent results achieved under the Slovenian Chair in 2005 under circumstances that were far from easy.
3. The EU recognises the OSCE as an important partner. We share the same principles and values including commitment to the promotion of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, as well as important responsibilities, especially in the areas of conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management, and post conflict rehabilitation.
4. We therefore welcome the intention of the Chair to intensify its cooperation with the EU and we will explore ways to achieve this goal. We equally believe that the OSCE should co-operate comprehensively and as effectively as possible with other international actors, in accordance with the Platform for Co-operative Security.

5. The Ljubljana Ministerial Council has adopted a Road Map to strengthen the effectiveness of the OSCE, a decision which now has to be implemented. The EU stands ready to support the Belgian Chair in carrying forward the tasks set out in the Ljubljana decision. We believe that open dialogue and the spirit of compromise are essential for consensus building within the OSCE as well as the Organisation's full-scope capability to act. We look forward to hearing the chairmanship's plans to carrying forward the implementation of the Road Map.
6. Conflict prevention and conflict resolution remain the core responsibilities of the OSCE. We believe that opportunities exist now for progress especially on South-Ossetia and Nagorno/Karabakh, in the latter case with the support of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. We strongly endorse the intention of the Chairman in Office to continue and renew efforts towards resolution of longstanding regional conflicts in the Southern Caucasus Region and Moldova. Fulfilment of the remaining commitments on the Republics of Georgia and Moldova, made at the OSCE's Istanbul Summit in 1999, remains key.
7. The Chairman in Office has rightly drawn our attention to Kosovo where the OSCE has its largest mission deployed.
8. The EU agrees with the thematic priorities presented by the Chairman in Office in his address. Advancing the rule of law, with a special focus on criminal justice and facilitating access to law are indeed essential elements of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to fighting organised crime. We also see the emphasis on police-related activities as important. We are looking forward to the implementation of the border security management concept.
9. Supporting the priorities of the Belgian Chair in the Politico-Military Dimension, the EU will assist where activities of common interest are ahead, including the forthcoming high-level Military Doctrine Seminar, which can give a fresh impetus to the first dimension, as well as the work regarding ammunition and SALW destruction.

10. Fostering the Economic and Environmental Dimension with the aim of underpinning its role in regional economic cooperation and conflict resolution as well as environmental protection and good governance is an objective also shared by the EU. We welcome transportation as the main theme for the Economic Forum. We commend the recent close attention by Minister De Gucht to the issue of energy supply. Energy and more specifically energy security are key issues for OSCE participating States. Building on the principles contained in the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, we hope that the OSCE can contribute positively to this increasingly important debate.
11. At the heart of the organisation's work is the promotion of core principles of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and good governance. The EU is in favour of a continued focus on these core areas of the human dimension, including freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and association, the right to a fair trial, gender equality and freedom from torture. We also welcome the Chairman in Office's intention to pursue the OSCE's work in the universal fight against all manifestations of intolerance including racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism with a special focus on the implementation of agreed principles.
12. We commend the Chair for its support of the work of ODIHR. We value the leadership provided by Ambassador Strohal and call for the renewal of his mandate for a further three years. In challenging times as these, it is important to maintain continuity at the helm of this institution. The EU particularly values and fully supports ODIHR's professional and impartial role and expertise in election-related activities. With the Road Map tasking to prepare a report for submission to the next Ministerial Council, ODIHR can now provide a sound basis for our further discussions in this area. Concerning the election calendar of this year, we call on Belarus to issue an early invitation to a full OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission at the forthcoming presidential elections and to give it all necessary support.

13. The field operations must continue to play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of OSCE norms and commitments. To fulfil this role, their functions must be fully upheld in a comprehensive manner. We support the proactive role of all OSCE missions.
14. We welcome the Chair's emphasis on strengthening dialogue and cooperation with the Partners for Cooperation with the aim of sharing more widely OSCE norms, principles, and commitments.
15. In conclusion, the EU reiterates its support for the Chairman in Office and the priorities he has outlined. The goals are ambitious, but if all organisations with responsibilities for European security can pull together, much can be achieved. The EU will play its part. We are confident that the OSCE will continue to prosper under the Chair's leadership this year.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia [\[1\]](#) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

[\[1\]](#) Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process