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Irish Presidency of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 493
05th February 2004**

EU Statement in response to the Address by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia H.E. Ms. Ilinka Mitreva

The European Union warmly welcomes the presence of the Foreign Minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia H.E. Ms. Ilinka Mitreva at the Permanent Council, and thanks her for her comprehensive intervention. We also welcome the Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission in Skjopje, Ambassador Carlos Pais.

The Union in the Thessaloniki Summit and subsequent meetings made known its determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, including yours, Minister, which will become an integral part of the EU once they meet the established criteria. We note that your country's formal application for EU membership will be lodged later this month.

The Stabilisation and Association Process is the framework for the European course of the Western Balkan countries, all the way to their future accession. In this respect the EU believes that the imminent entry into force of the SAP Agreement will reinforce the ties between your country and the EU.

The European Union has repeatedly stressed its full support for the European perspective of your country. This support has been demonstrated notably through the CARDS programme, and EU operations Concordia and Proxima. We share your assessment that the security situation of the country has much improved. The main threat to stability is no longer armed conflict but organised crime. For this reason, and in close partnership with your government, the EU has launched Operation Proxima. Through monitoring, mentoring, and advising, EUPOL Proxima will support the further development of an efficient and professional police service, and promote European standards of policing. The General Affairs and External Relations Council of 26 January last has welcomed the strong commitment made by your Government to work closely with EUPOL Proxima which will cooperate with the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission, which itself continues to play a valuable role in the field of Police Training and Reform.

The European Union reaffirms the importance it attaches to the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement as an essential requirement for further progress towards integration into European structures.

The Council of the European Union accordingly decided on 26 January to restrict travel into or through the EU by individuals who actively promote or take part in violent extremist activities challenging the Ohrid Framework Agreement's basic principles of stability, territorial integrity and the unitary and multi-ethnic character of the State.

We recognise the important steps taken by successive Governments in Skopje in advancing integration into European structures, with the support of the international community including the EU and the OSCE. In this context, we welcome the proposal by your Government for the adoption of key laws on the decentralisation process; by doing so the legislation foreseen in the above Agreement will be completed and focus should be shifted to its implementation, which will be crucial in view of the municipal elections later this year.

The EU welcomes the steps taken to improve equitable representation in the administration and state institutions and we look forward to further efforts of your government in this regard. The Union takes note of the census results in the country. We welcome the fact that they were established in accordance with international and European standards, as confirmed by the International Census Observer Mission which has closely monitored the entire process, and were broadly accepted within the country. The recent decision of the Parliament to pass the Law on the Establishment of the State University in Tetovo is one more step towards inter-ethnic reconciliation. We also welcome the success of the multi-ethnic South Eastern Europe University.

The European Union stresses the importance of reconstruction efforts and revitalisation of the former crisis areas to which the Union, through the European Reconstruction Agency, has greatly contributed. The return of the remaining IDPs, with the help of the OSCE Mission, remains a priority in confidence building.

The Union cannot but be pleased with the results of the SALW collection process. The fact that more weapons were collected than expected is a positive sign of developing trust in the former crisis areas.

The European Union shares the appreciation the Foreign Minister expressed, for the results of the cooperation among major international organisations in her country. In this respect we would like to stress once more the excellent cooperation which the EU has enjoyed over the years with the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission in Skopje. The work of the OSCE Mission has been a decisive factor in promoting stability and democracy in the country and complements the Union's own efforts in this field. We remain confident that in the future this mutually reinforcing cooperation will continue. Border management, daily confidence building work and assistance in the establishment of the rule of law are important areas of possible interaction and cooperation. We believe that the Programme of the Bulgarian C-i-O may offer further scope for co-operation.

The new European Union Special representative Mr. Søren Jessen-Petersen took office on 1 February. The EU looks forward to the continuation of the cooperative relationship between your Government and the EU Special Representative together with the Delegation of the European Commission and the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission in Skopje.

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.

