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EU STATEMENT ON ALBANIAN ELECTIONS

Mr Chairman, allow me to recall that the European Council held in Brussels on 16 and 17 June underlined the importance of holding free and democratic elections in Albania in accordance with international standards, including in the regions where minorities live, in the context of that country's rapprochement with the EU.

Following the election day, I should like to draw attention to the statement made on 4 July by EU High Representative, Javier Solana, on the elections in Albania in which he said, and I quote:

"I welcome that the elections yesterday, which registered a high voter turnout, took place in a generally peaceful manner in most parts of the country. I note, however, that the first reports refer to certain shortcomings. These shortcomings must be investigated and addressed so that they do not recur in future.

All political forces must continue to refrain from premature conclusions on the outcome and await the results of the final count, and should act in accordance with the Code of Conduct in accepting the results achieved as a democratic expression of the choice of the Albanian electorate. Any disputes must be referred to the relevant Albanian bodies, and their independent decisions must be fully respected. Looking forward to the OSCE/ODIHR's final assessment, it is important that the next steps in the electoral process, and any possible further campaigning, fully comply with international standards and entirely respect the Electoral Law and the Code of Conduct.

I appeal to all democratic forces to work together in order to ensure that a new government based on a clear and strong European reform agenda can be formed in a rapid, smooth and democratic manner, and I look forward to a constructive working spirit in the new Parliament."



End of quote.

The EU takes this opportunity strongly to commend the OSCE Presence in Albania for its efforts to assist the Albanian authorities over the past years to improve electoral standards. We consider that the Presence should continue to play a major role, including through its field stations, in supporting the ambitious process of reforms, including electoral reform, in which the country is currently engaged. We believe that the Presence's Mandate, updated at the end of 2003, remains a good basis for the Presence's programmes and activities.

We would also like to express our appreciation for the work of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia ¹, align themselves with this declaration.

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process