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PC.DEL/54/04
29 January 2004

ENGLISH only

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**Permanent Council No. 492
29th January 2004**

EU statement in response to Director of ODIHR, Ambassador Strohal

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Strohal to the Permanent Council and thanks him for a comprehensive and forward-looking report. We appreciate ODIHR's important role as a conflict prevention instrument, its contribution to institution building, promotion of human rights, rule of law democratic elections and relationships with civil society and NGOs. In the spirit of the EU Council conclusions on EU-OSCE co-operation, the EU is committed to close cooperation with ODIHR and will actively support ODIHR in implementation of the decisions taken at Maastricht

The Ambassador underlined that ODIHR will intensify its work on the promotion of non-discrimination and tolerance. In particular it will assist with the preparation for the three OSCE events in Berlin, Paris and Brussels, and will set up a collection point for data in this field. The EU attaches great importance to the three events and to their thorough preparation.

In respect of the collection point, the EU strongly encourages ODIHR to make thorough use of the experiences of relevant bodies, such as the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Union Monitoring Centre. **We also encourage ODIHR**, where appropriate, to further develop its co-operation with relevant bodies of the OSCE, in particular with the Representative on Freedom of the

Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We all of us bear responsibility for the functioning of the collection point and must make a concerted effort to help ODIHR in keeping its data as accurate as possible through well-tested methodology. The EU is committed to ensuring that the OSCE, including the collection point, deals with tolerance in a holistic and comprehensive manner. A thorough effort should be made at creating coherence and consistency in the data and statistics collected. In this context, we look forward to a progress report from ODIHR at the upcoming Berlin conference.

The European Commission, through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, and individual EU member states are engaged in joint activities with ODIHR in several participating States.

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democratic institutions and of democratic governance. During this year ODIHR plans to deploy approximately 12 Election Observation Missions. The EU would like to express great satisfaction with how this work is carried out by ODIHR and emphasise the importance we attach to the monitoring of forthcoming elections, especially in Belarus and Ukraine. We recognise the timely reaction of ODIHR to the developments last year in Georgia and commend it for its readiness to rapidly respond to the needs that arose. We encourage ODIHR to continue to interact with other international organisations in the field of elections.

The EU strongly supports the intention of ODIHR to develop a consistent follow-up approach to election observation mission reports and to provide assistance to States in implementing their OSCE commitments. We believe that education on electoral systems could be a central part of this assistance. We encourage ODIHR to make an early report to the Permanent Council on these issues.

In the fight against terrorism, the EU strongly supports the view of the Director of ODIHR that all measures taken must be carried out in full accordance with international law, without ambiguity, and with particular attention to human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law.

Ambassador Strohal also refers to the upcoming Supplementary Human Dimension meeting in March, which will focus on human rights education. In this, the final year

of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education, the EU recalls the Vienna Declaration, which states that human rights education, training and public information are essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. We are prepared to work with the Chairmanship in its efforts to make education a central theme of this year. As Ambassador Strohal so rightly puts it, education has always been, and will be, a major tool for securing democratic governance and in particular generating respect for human rights in all its aspects.

In December 2003 ODIHR circulated its programming document for 2004. Its thematic structure replaces the previous concentration on individual projects. This is a much-improved way of approaching such a multi-faceted operation. We believe it will both improve ODIHR's management structure and pave the way for a higher degree of continuation in projects.

The EU would like to take this opportunity to re-affirm its support for ODIHR in facing the challenges ahead. We take note of Ambassador Strohal's comments on funding, and of his concerns on how this might affect ODIHR activities. We greatly appreciate the work of ODIHR in carrying out such operational activities and note that at the mid-year review, ODIHR will have the opportunity to bring its proposals in this regard to the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance.

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.

