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**Special Permanent Council No. 579  
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**EU statement in response to the  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia**

The EU warmly welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia H.E. Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović to the Permanent Council.

We should like once again to express our satisfaction at the 3 October opening of EU accession negotiations with Croatia. This decision reflects substantial progress in the process of reconciliation and democratization made by Croatia, in which the OSCE and its Mission has played an important assisting role.

We recognise and welcome the progress achieved by Croatia in several areas, in particular visible progress in regional cooperation and reconciliation as well as the adoption of Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, the further implementation of which we strongly encourage. There remains, however, important work to be done in the areas of rule of law, judicial reform, and return and integration of refugees as well as increasing the representation of minorities in the administration in line with the relevant legislation. The country and the Mission should continue to focus on these areas since they are linked to overcoming the legacy of the past. In this context, we stress the importance of full cooperation with ICTY, crucial to the success of accession negotiations.

The EU highly values the excellent cooperation between the OSCE Mission in Croatia and the host country. The OSCE Mission in Croatia serves as a model of effective support along the path to democratic conditions. We look forward to the continuation of this cooperation towards fulfilment of the Mission's mandate.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Country Turkey, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA country Norway, as well as Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.