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## **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 785th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 December 2009

### **Regarding the vote prohibiting the construction of minarets in Switzerland**

The European Union would like to thank the Swiss delegation for its statement. It takes note of the result of the referendum organized on 29 November 2009 against the recommendation of the Swiss Government and Parliament, which prohibits the construction of new minarets in Switzerland. It notes that this referendum does not prevent Muslims from practising their religion and does not prohibit the construction of new places of worship.

The European Union notes that Ms. Calmy-Rey, Federal Councillor and Head of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, indicated in the statement she made at the Ministerial Council meeting in Athens that the Swiss Government was concerned by this vote.

The European Union is based on respect for human rights and all the fundamental freedoms as indicated in article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union, including the freedom of belief and religion. It is also particularly committed to the values of tolerance and non-discrimination. It opposes every measure that may stigmatize persons who practise a religion.

We underscore the importance of the OSCE's achievements as regards fundamental freedoms and tolerance and non-discrimination since the Helsinki Final Act. These subjects are among the priorities of the EU.

The EU supports the action taken by the OSCE in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination and reiterates its support for the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and all three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office for tolerance and non-discrimination.

The European Union hopes that the result of this vote will not have a negative effect on the good integration of Muslims in Switzerland and that their freedom of belief will be fully respected in line with the commitments we have undertaken within the OSCE.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Stabilisation and Association Process countries and potential candidate

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\* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

countries Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.