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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1345th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

18 November 2021

In response to the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference and the Head of the High-Level Planning Group

The European Union extends a warm welcome to the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group Igor Khovaev and Brice Roquefeuil, who are speaking for the first time at the Permanent Council, and Andrew Schofer, to the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference Andrzej Kasprzyk, and to the Head of the High-Level Planning Group Colonel Claes Nilsson. It thanks them sincerely for their respective reports.

The European Union welcomes the recent meeting between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Paris on 10 November on the margins of the General Assembly of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under the aegis of the three Co-Chairs. This meeting, which was opened by the Minister for European and Foreign Affairs of France, carries on from the first meeting in New York on 23 September in the same format and is aimed at continuing the momentum set in train on that occasion, which the European Union welcomes. At the same time, the European Union notes with satisfaction the statements by the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia, who expressed their agreement in principle to the holding of a bilateral meeting under the aegis of the Co-Chairs. Apart from these announcements, which the leaders of the two countries now need to put into practice, the European Union reiterates its appeal to the parties to resume the peace process through direct dialogue with a view to fostering security, stability and prosperity in the region.

The European Union regrets the loss of human life as a result of the hostilities and expresses its condolences to the families of those killed or wounded. It repeats that a complete cessation of the fighting is required to pave the way towards a resumption of substantive negotiations between the parties leading to the establishment of lasting peace in the region of the South Caucasus for the benefit of its inhabitants. It emphasizes that numerous outstanding questions have still to be resolved for progress to be made towards a negotiated, comprehensive and lasting settlement. It urges the parties to return as soon as possible to the negotiating table and to engage – in good faith, under the aegis of the Co-Chairs and within the framework of the Minsk Group – in the identification and discussion of the various parameters of a future comprehensive agreement on the basis of the principles well known to the parties.

While the situation on the ground stabilized after the signature on 9 November 2020 of the trilateral statement by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia, the first anniversary of which was celebrated last week, the European Union is extremely concerned at the recent armed incidents in the region over the past few days and the casualties caused by

them, including the occurrences at the State border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Like the Co-Chairs in their statement of 15 November, it is worried at the recent increase in tension.

In that context, the European Union urgently calls on the parties to respect the commitments they have undertaken and to demonstrate the greatest restraint in words and deeds. It urges them to take all necessary measures to bring about an immediate de-escalation and the return of all forces to the positions they occupied before 12 May, to refrain from any inflammatory and provocative rhetoric, and to make real efforts to address the most pressing issues. It prevails on them to commit themselves to the demarcation and delimitation of the border between the two countries within the framework of a negotiated process, regardless of any pre-existing situation on the ground and in accordance with a formula acceptable to both parties, and welcomes the assistance offered by the Co-Chairs.

The European Union calls in particular for strict observance of the ceasefire, the immediate release of all remaining prisoners, full co-operation in demining and the de-escalation of tensions in the border regions. Like the Co-Chairs, it stresses the need for guaranteed unobstructed access to the region for international humanitarian organizations and is gratified to note the continuation of regular and substantive dialogue by the Co-Chairs with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. While welcoming the recent release by Azerbaijan of Armenian soldiers, the European Union points out that the release of prisoners of war and other detainees should be completed as an important humanitarian gesture that will help to de-escalate tensions and restore trust between the parties. It joins the Co-Chairs in stressing the importance of making progress in other humanitarian issues, such as the situation of missing persons, the voluntary return of displaced persons and protection of the historical and cultural heritage.

The European Union remains resolved to advocate and promote peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus and to make an active contribution to consolidating peace and to post-conflict rehabilitation throughout the region. In that regard, it points out that it has assisted the people affected by the conflict by allocating more than 17 million euros for humanitarian aid, in particular for demining and early recovery. It is also willing to support de-escalation and the delimitation of the borders by providing technical assistance as required by the parties and by fostering confidence-building measures. It encourages connectivity and the resumption of economic co-operation in the South Caucasus.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the mediation format of the Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs for finding comprehensive solutions to all the remaining problems connected with or resulting from the conflict in accordance with the mandate given to the Co-Chairs. It stands ready to contribute to this, also through the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar. It also reaffirms its support for the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office and his team, whose activities are vital to the work of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group. Finally, it recalls its commitment to the High-Level Planning Group, which remains an important element in the Minsk process architecture.

In conclusion, the European Union points out that it is vital to allocate sufficient funds for the complementary activities carried out by the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, and the High-Level Planning Group.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.