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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 723rd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL

24 July 2008

Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on the Western Balkans

The European Union (EU) would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the European Union of 22 July 2008 on the Western Balkans.

The Council welcomes the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, who is indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This development illustrates the commitment of the new Government in Belgrade to contribute to peace and stability in the Balkans region. It is a significant step on Serbia's path towards the EU.

The Council encourages the Serbian Government to continue along that path.

The Council draws attention to the European Council conclusions of 19 and 20 June 2008, which state that Serbia can accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status, as soon as all the necessary conditions are met.

The Council also encourages the new Serbian Government to maintain positive relations with the European Union and its Member States and to take a constructive approach to the EU's efforts to contribute to peace and stability in the Balkans region.

The Council also reiterates its attachment to dialogue on visa liberalization with Serbia and calls on the new Government to focus on full implementation of the criteria set out in the road map.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* ; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania and Montenegro; the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Liechtenstein; as well as the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

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