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Statement of the European Union in Response to the Montenegrin Foreign Minister, Milan Roćen

The European Union welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Montenegro H.E. Mr Milan Roćen to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address.

Mr Chairman, Montenegro has come a long way in a very short time. Montenegro only gained its independence in June last year. Since then it has been putting in place the legal and institutional set-up required by its new competences as an independent state. It has held elections which the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission considered were conducted largely in accordance with OSCE commitments and international standards. The Montenegrin authorities should make full use of the recommendations contained in the final report by the ODIHR on the elections. And the new government has pursued policies that have helped Montenegro move further along the economic and political reform path in pursuit of its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Furthermore, on 19 October, Montenegro adopted a constitution that is generally in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe and its Venice Commission. We congratulate Montenegro on this and we trust that the broad consensus already achieved will play a stabilising role in the country as a whole. By adopting this new constitution Montenegro has strengthened its democracy and the rule of law. It will now be important

that the country's democratic and institutional resources are mobilized and that efforts are made to implement the constitution in line with European standards.

Mr Chairman, ten days ago in Luxembourg the European Union signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and an Interim Agreement with Montenegro. The EU regards this as an important step in Montenegro's path towards the EU and looks forward to intensifying co-operation with Montenegro. The EU stresses the importance of Montenegro establishing a sustained and effective track record in implementing these Agreements and encourages Montenegro to push ahead with its reform agenda. We hope that this signature will set an example for other countries in the region.

The EU urges Montenegro to intensify its efforts on the priorities set out in the European Partnership. In particular, it stresses the importance of further determined action and sustained progress in strengthening administrative capacity and the rule of law, including the fight against organised crime and corruption, as well as the establishment of an independent and accountable judiciary.

The EU attaches great importance to the role of the OSCE Mission in Montenegro. The Mission has a broad mandate covering all three dimensions of OSCE activity. It does excellent work in promoting democratisation, tolerance, the rule of law, and ethnic minority rights. It is helping to strengthen the capacity of the Montenegrin authorities to combat organised crime and corruption, and is promoting regional co-operation, notably on border policing and the fight against human trafficking. The EU notes the very good relationship between the Montenegrin authorities and the Mission, and the constructive role played by the Montenegrin delegation here in Vienna. The EU is pleased that Montenegro recognises that the OSCE can help it to fulfill its aspirations.

Finally Mr Chairman we would like once again to thank Foreign Minister Roćen for addressing the Permanent Council today. We wish him and his country success with their political and economic reforms and in their efforts to meet their strategic objective of EU accession.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia 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.