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Statement of the European Union in Response to H.E. Mr. Zurab Nogaideli, Prime Minister of Georgia

The European Union warmly welcomes Prime Minister Nogaideli back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address.

Much has happened since your last visit, one year ago. The EU and Georgia have strengthened their relationship in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy through the adoption of the Georgia-European Union Action Plan. We have been following developments in Georgia closely throughout the year.

The EU reiterates its support for the ongoing democratic reform process in Georgia. We encourage the authorities to continue their efforts in this regard, and welcome their constructive relationship with the Mission to Georgia, which supports the Government in implementing its ambitious reform agenda in a sustainable manner. Activities regarding capacity building of legal and democratic institutions (such as the judiciary) and the promotion of human rights (including those of persons belonging to national minorities) are fully in line with ENP priorities.

The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The EU supports all

efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts, which we consider to be of vital importance for the future of the whole region. We welcome the Georgian commitment to non-use of force. We note the activities of the Georgian State Commission on Developing Proposals for the Determination of the Final Status of the Former Autonomous District of South Ossetia, and reaffirm the high importance the EU attaches to dialogue between all parties and groups involved, in an all-inclusive manner, as a basic principle of conflict resolution. With regard to South Ossetia we continue to encourage the parties to use all negotiating formats, including the Joint Control Commission and Authorized Delegations, in a constructive manner to explore ways of increasing the effectiveness of the conflict resolution process. We welcome the fact that a JCC meeting could finally take place on 23 and 24 October and, though we are disappointed that it did not produce concrete results, we call on the Parties to continue a more constructive dialogue within this format.

The EU remains deeply concerned about the missile incident of 6 August. This demonstrated once again the urgent need to implement without further delay the agreed demilitarisation and confidence building measures, and to establish effective mechanisms to prevent such incidents from happening again. The EU considers the OSCE to be the most appropriate body for dealing with these issues and welcomed the recent discussion of the incident in the Forum for Security Co-operation. We welcome the CiO's food-for-thought paper on the way forward which proposes using existing conflict prevention mechanisms more effectively and strengthening the role of OSCE Mission in developing confidence building measures. We hope that an agreement can be reached soon on the modalities regarding the much-needed increase in the number of OSCE military observers. Additionally, we believe that the establishment of new joint checkpoints in the region would improve confidence, security and stability on the ground. This would also help maintain the necessary conditions for the implementation of the economic rehabilitation projects. The EU remains ready to assist, including through the work of the EU Special Representative for the Southern Caucasus and the use of EU instruments. We continue to encourage

the parties to fully engage in the speedy implementation of the agreed confidence building measures.

The missile incident also underlines the importance of the proposed Border Management Support Programme, to be set up within the framework of the OSCE Border Security Management Concept as established at the 2005 Ministerial Council. The EU would like to express its support for this programme which promotes effective information sharing and cooperation.

We reiterate our full support for the OSCE Economic Rehabilitation Programme in South Ossetia, to which the EU and its member states are major contributors. We commend the Mission to Georgia for its hard work towards a successful implementation of this ambitious programme. We are pleased that the Steering Committee will meet in Vienna on 12 November. We call on all parties to ensure that subsequent meetings, including joint field visits, will take place on a regular basis. We therefore reiterate our call upon parties to help create and maintain the necessary conditions for the implementation and monitoring of the projects. The adequate and timely implementation of the programme, which is meant to benefit all the population of South Ossetia, is of the utmost importance for the region. We repeat our call on all donors to honour their commitments made at last year's donors' conference in Brussels, for implementation through the OSCE. We warmly welcome Georgia's decision to underline its commitment to the programme by allocating an additional tranche of 250,000 EUR.

The EU welcomes the completion of the Russian withdrawal from the military base at Akhalkalaki, and the removal of Russian military equipment from the Batumi base on 5 July in accordance with agreements made. We welcome the ongoing efforts aimed at resolving remaining issues relating to the Gudauta base.

Finally, let me reiterate the wish of the EU to work closely with all parties in promoting prosperity and stability in the Southern Caucasus and to deepen our relationship with Georgia within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Mr. Prime Minister, we again thank you for your presence in this Permanent Council and wish you all the best.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, as well as EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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