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STATEMENT

By the delegation of Montenegro
As was planned for delivery
at the 697^h meeting of the Permanent Council,
January 24th, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of my delegation allow me to warmly welcome Minister Rupel in this traditional PC appearance of the current EU Presidency and to say a few words in our national capacity. We carefully followed your presentation, your comments, drawings and highlights and not only when you have touched the subject of particular interest for Montenegro and our region.

We wish to congratulate Slovenia for their achievement in assuming the EU Presidency as the first of new members within the block and to convey our belief that they will do an excellent job in the months to come.

With satisfaction we have acknowledged that Slovenia has decided to keep Western Balkans as a focus of its agenda, a fact that can only be of benefit to both the Region and the EU. We are confident that the EU perspective for our Region is still vivid as it had been a few years ago. Without doubt it serves as the best reform incentive for all of us.

My country has been putting high emphasis on the regional cooperation. Montenegro is proud of its traditionally good neighbourly relations with all the countries of the WB region, and is of strong opinion that its future and the future of each and every country in it can have only one - European destination. As it is important to keep this European accession track steady, it is in our opinion also important that every country be judged by its own merits and its achieved progress.

The remaining challenges that await us in the Region this year are not small. We believe that solution for Kosovo issue should be such to confirm the EU prospective of the Region and enhance its stability.

Mr. Chairman,

Last year marked a very important achievement for Montenegro when the Stabilisation and Association Agreement was signed with the EU. The implementation of so called Interim Agreement has begun from January, 1st. In implementing necessary commitments, Montenegro wants to remain a serious and reliable partner to the EU, as it has proved by its significant progress since regaining independence. We have duly taken into consideration the last Commission report on Montenegro. The Government has as well entrusted its various bodies to implement the recommendations from that Report. Moreover, the Parliament of Montenegro has recently adopted a Resolution reconfirming its obligations to implement the SAA. It is our sincere hope to continue these undertakings without sparing our efforts with a strong belief that will enable us to seize momentum and apply for candidate country status in foreseeable future.

We are particularly pleased with the EU application centre that was officially opened in October last year in Slovenian Embassy in Podgorica. This is yet another proof of good bilateral relations between two countries and your understanding of our interests and particular needs of our citizens. The Centre has proven its purpose and has substantially facilitated visa application procedure for citizens of Montenegro.

Mr. Chairman,

At the end, allow me, on behalf of my country, to wish Minister Rupel and Slovenia all the success during their Presidency. Thank you.