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STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA Dr. MIOMIR ZUZUL
delivered by Vesko GARČEVIĆ, Ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro, at
the 495th (Special) Meeting of the Permanent Council, 16 February 2004

Mr. Chairman,

Delegation of Serbia and Montenegro would like to join others in warmly welcoming our distinguished guest, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Miomir Zuzul at today's meeting of Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive presentation. We also kindly welcome the presence of the Head of the OSCE Mission in Croatia, Ambassador Peter Semneby.

This kind of event is always a good opportunity for every individual country and the Region as a whole to present its efforts and achievements on the road towards European integration. We believe that every positive step on that path of any of the five countries participating in the Stabilization and Association Process of the EU represents a positive development for the entire Region. We closely follow and welcome Croatian advancement in that field which is a positive sign for Serbia and Montenegro too.

Since we share the same goals, we have to work jointly on strengthening regional co-operation and bilateral relations. We would also like to mention positive trend of improvement of bilateral relations between Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro. We welcome the decision of the Croatian Government to prolong the abolishment of the visa regime for citizens of Serbia and Montenegro as an example of its willingness to promote good neighbouring relations and regional cooperation. We believe this kind of regime will become permanent in the future.

Serbia and Montenegro is committed to continue to develop good bilateral relations and together with Croatian authorities work to close some open issues. We are confident this is a unique moment for us to jointly resolve the inherited difficult questions.

We greet the new relationship established between the Government and minority representatives in Croatia. We are encouraged by the Agreement signed with the representatives of Serbian minority in the Parliament and

information that elections for minority representatives to local governments and minority councils were held yesterday. This is a sign that only swift, full and comprehensive implementation of Constitutional Law on Minority Rights will set up necessary preconditions for adequate protection of minorities. Generally, we feel that minority rights regime in Croatia has been improved in recent past. At the same time, fight and suppression of national extremism, radicalism and intolerance is still the main goal not only for Croatia but for all countries in the Region as well.

Right to return, protection of ownership and property rights are no doubt one of basic human rights deeply rooted in European standards and values. For every country in the Region fulfillment of these commitments is closely lined with a wider European integration process. Therefore, authorities of Serbia and Montenegro have positively noted that Croatian Government recognized that the issue of occupancy rights must be addressed. However, repossession of occupied private property and land, as well as acquired rights such as pensions, still wait to be resolved in consistent manner as it has been done throughout the former Yugoslavia.

We also greet awareness-raising campaign on the issue of refugee return, which is organized by the OSCE Mission and Croatian authorities. We do hope that Croatian Government will ensure necessary prerequisites for unconditional and sustainable return of all refugees. Having in mind this, we believe that Common Principles of return developed by three OSCE Mission in the Region should be operationalized. This is why we support Joint action plan on regional return completed by OSCE Missions as a good instrument for implementation of Common Principles.

Mr. Chairman,

We are aware that OSCE Mission in Croatia, under the able leadership of Ambassador Semneby, will continue to play useful role particularly in mentioned areas but also in providing assistance in reform processes undertaken by Croatian Government. Therefore, we support synergy between EU and OSCE which brings Croatia closer to the EU.

I thank You Mr. Chairman.