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EU statement in response to the Head of OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, and the EUSR and Head of the EC Delegation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ambassador Erwan Fouéré

The European Union welcomes the Head of the OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, in his first appearance at the Permanent Council. We also welcome the EU Special Representative and Head of the European Commission Delegation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ambassador Erwan Fouéré. We thank them both for their comprehensive reports. Their joint presence is a welcome reflection of the close cooperation between the EU and the OSCE on the ground.

Mr. Chairman, the EU Special Representative Ambassador Fouéré has already elaborated on the close relationship between the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is a candidate country to join the European Union. In this context, the European Union stresses once more the importance it attaches to the further implementation of the reform agenda in order to bring the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia closer to the European Union. We would like to reiterate our support for the efforts of the country to that effect and encourage it to work constructively to ensure regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations including finding mutually acceptable solutions on outstanding issues.

The EU is pleased to note that all of the necessary legislation called for by the Ohrid Framework Agreement has already been passed and that state institutions now focus

on implementing these laws. The Government's and the Prime Minister's efforts to improve the economic situation in the country, as well as to create a more investment-friendly climate are initiatives in the right direction. At the same time, the European Commission's Progress Report last November showed that further reform efforts are necessary. Political consensus is a crucial precondition for the country's European Union integration. Therefore, we call on all political actors to work constructively towards creating a positive and productive political environment.

We share the view of Ambassador Radicati that the courts' capacity to handle the four returning non-indicted war crimes cases from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia will be a major test of both a legal and a political nature for the country and its judicial system. The OSCE Mission's monitoring of and technical assistance to these cases will play a major role in supporting the courts in their difficult task.

The EU fully agrees that the rule of law should remain the overarching priority of the Mission, with special emphasis on the long-term strategy of Judicial Reform, the fight against trafficking, organised crime and corruption, decentralisation and strengthening the capacity of domestic institutions and the overall legislative framework. Additionally, the EU commends the Mission for its work, programmes and activities in the areas of police development and building confidence and respect between ethnic communities. Developments in the Kosovo final status process may also have possible impacts in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, as EU Special Representative Fouéré has stated, it will be necessary for the international community to remain vigilant.

The EU notes Ambassador Radicati's re-evaluation of the Mission's Field Stations. During the up-coming programme outline discussions, the future structure of the Mission, including its Field Stations, will have to be discussed.

The EU expresses its appreciation to Ambassador Radicati and his staff for their valuable work. The EU equally would like to thank the EU Special Representative and Head of the European Commission Delegation, Ambassador Fouéré and his

staff. We hope for a continued good cooperation and wish both Ambassador Radicati and Ambassador Fouéré all the best for the future.

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

* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.