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Statement of the European Union in response to the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabad, Ambassador Djikic

The European Union welcomes Ambassador Djikic back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The European Union notes several positive developments in Turkmenistan since the taking of office of President Berdymukhammedov, including encouraging moves in the fields of education, health, and agriculture. The European Union has taken note of the demonstrated readiness of Turkmenistan to intensify its dialogue and co-operation with the OSCE, including ODIHR, as exemplified by the visit of the CiO to the country. We have also taken positive note of the recent visit of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights.

However, the European Union encourages Turkmenistan to fully implement its OSCE commitments, and to further intensify its efforts on democratic reforms, especially on guaranteeing adherence to internationally accepted human rights standards. The recommendations of the Report of the UN Secretary General on the Situation of Human Rights in Turkmenistan of October 2006, as well as the recommendations of the OSCE Rapporteur's Report on Turkmenistan of March 2003 remain important milestones in further implementing efforts.

The European Union fully supports the OSCE Centre in Ashgabad and commends the Centre for its achievements. The Centre has an important potential to assist Turkmenistan in implementing OSCE commitments in all three OSCE dimensions. We welcome the continued efforts of the Centre to enhance the dialogue with

Turkmen authorities. We would like to underline that improved dialogue and increased responsiveness on the Turkmen side could considerably enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the assistance of the Centre. In particular this could be achieved by granting the Centre more direct access to relevant Turkmen ministries and institutions. The EU believes that the activities of the Centre could be further expanded in order to adequately address all three dimensions.

The European Union continues to stand ready to assist Turkmenistan in its reform efforts, and to further intensify dialogue and co-operation in particular through the contacts of the EU Special Representative on Central Asia. The upcoming EU-Turkmenistan Trade and Co-operation Joint Committee, as well as the first EU Turkmenistan seminar on social development, which will take place this coming June, will provide other opportunities in this regard.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Ambassador Djikic and his team for their dedicated and successful work, and we wish them every success in their future activities.

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, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

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