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**Permanent Council No 549
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**EU RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE COORDINATION
CENTERS OF SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO AND THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FOR
KOSOVO AND METOHIA, DR. NEBOJSA COVIC**

The European Union welcomes Dr. Nebojsa Covic, President of the Coordination Centres of Serbia and Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohia, at the Permanent Council and thanks him for his presentation.

The European Union follows developments in Kosovo with great attention. We remain committed to a strong engagement with a view to building a democratic and multiethnic Kosovo within Europe. To this end, the EU actively supports the work of the Contact Group, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK).

Mr. Chairman, the European Union considers it of utmost importance for Belgrade to engage on the crucial issues lying ahead in 2005. We therefore call upon the authorities in Belgrade to re-engage in constructive cooperation. At the same time, it is paramount that Kosovo Serbs return to the democratic institutions and participate in public life. As we have repeatedly pointed out, participation in the political process is the best way for the Kosovo Serbs to promote their legitimate concerns. We strongly call upon the authorities in Belgrade to encourage Kosovo-Serbs to re-engage in the dialogue process and in the institutional life in Kosovo. We also reiterate our call upon the Provisional Institutions for Self Government (PISG) to reach out to the minority communities at all levels, including addressing their security concerns and perceptions, and to reinforce conditions for a participation of minorities in public life.

The European Union calls on the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina to further pursue and enhance their dialogue. We welcome the holding of a first meeting of the Working Group on Missing Persons in Belgrade on 16 March and hope that this will be a first step towards more constructive dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

With regard to Southern Serbia, the EU commends the positive role of the South Serbia Coordination Body in promoting a peaceful, multiethnic society in Southern Serbia, and recognises the progress achieved. We welcome the 3 March joint statement by the President of the Coordinating Body and political representatives of both Serb and Albanian communities in Southern Serbia, agreeing to work together on a reinvigorated Coordinating

Body programme to improve the lives of all citizens of the area. This agreement has the support of the international community, including the EU. We especially commend the OSCE Mission, which brokered the agreement and continues to play an essential role in South Serbia in promoting security and confidence. The EU hopes to see concrete improvements soon, resulting from efforts of the eight new Coordination Groups tasked with taking the programme forward. We call on all political forces in South Serbia actively to engage in these efforts and to live up to their commitment towards a peaceful solution of the problems in South Serbia.

In conclusion the European Union thanks Dr. Covic again for addressing the Permanent Council today. The EU remains ready for an open and constructive dialogue with him and the authorities in Belgrade on all issues.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement.

¹Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process