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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1012
Vienna, 24 July 2014**

**EU Statement in Response to the Address by the President
of the Venice Commission, Mr. Gianni Buquicchio**

The European Union welcomes Mr Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Venice Commission, to the Permanent Council. The Venice Commission is an important partner of both the EU and the OSCE and we have listened with great interest to your address this morning.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are values which represent our common heritage. They are values at the heart of the European Union and central aspects of the work of the OSCE and Council of Europe. The strong and close cooperation that characterises our relationships, is both a natural consequence of our shared values and also crucial to their implementation. Open, democratic societies, where citizens are able to freely exercise their human rights, rely on strong institutions, robust laws and access to justice. ODIHR and the Venice Commission play a crucial role in assisting OSCE participating States to develop such frameworks. Like ODIHR, the Venice Commission has indisputable assets. The Commission's pan-European and indeed global dimension, its extensive experience of providing legal advice to its Member States, and its experience in supporting the establishment of democratic institutions, make the Venice Commission a strategic partner for the EU.

The European Union fully supports the partnership that exists between the Venice Commission and ODIHR, which we have heard about this morning. Together the Venice Commission and ODIHR have prepared important guidelines for participating States and carried out joint legal analyses. We welcome that even when undertaking separate initiatives, there is often close consultation on topics of

mutual expertise to ensure that findings and recommendations will be consistent with the assessment of the other. We call on all participating States to draw on the expertise of both ODIHR and the Venice Commission, and to heed their advice. By doing so, participating States can ensure that their legislation is in full compliance with their OSCE and other international commitments.

The engagement of the Venice Commission in Ukraine is a prime example of the crucial assistance that the Commission provides. We commend the government of Ukraine for engaging the Commission as it seeks to reform its constitution. We also wish to reiterate our continued support for the work of the Venice Commission, and the Council of Europe more broadly, as it assists the Ukrainian authorities in ensuring that these reforms are in line with European standards. The European Union also took careful note of the Venice Commission's opinion on the illegal referendum, which took place in Crimea in March.

We also value the Venice Commission's legal analysis as a means of promoting and protecting the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms. In that respect, we note their legal opinion in June on the Russian Federation's "foreign agents" law and call on the Russian authorities to implement the Opinion's recommendations.

We have also listened carefully to the information you have shared about the engagement of the Venice Commission in the whole OSCE area and with our OSCE Partners for Cooperation. The EU recognises and welcomes the important support and experience the Council of Europe, and in particular the Venice Commission, provide to our partners countries in the Eastern Partnership area, the Western Balkans, Central Asia, and our partners in the Southern Mediterranean. This assistance aids them in ensuring their important democratic reforms are in accordance with European and international standards.

In conclusion, we would like to once again express our appreciation to Mr Buquicchio for addressing the Permanent Council today. We look forward to continued close cooperation between the EU and the Venice Commission and also between the OSCE, and in particular ODIHR, and the Commission, as we seek to strengthen the rule of law and protect and promote human rights in our region.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.