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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Helsinki, 5 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

The European Union (EU) warmly thanks the Finnish Chairmanship for its hospitality and for the energy with which it has directed this Council.

The European Union regrets that despite the laudable efforts of the Finnish Chairmanship and the majority of the participants it has not been possible to adopt the political declaration. It fully supports the declaration of the Chairmanship, which concurs completely with the EU's priorities and its conclusions. It is also pleased that the ministers' working lunch enabled some interesting thoughts to be exchanged on the future of European security.

The European Union welcomes the adoption of a ministerial declaration on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which solemnly reaffirms, as the EU strongly desired, the force and the scope of our commitments in this area.

We are also pleased at the adoption of a number of significant decisions that will enrich the day-to-day activity of our Organization and will permit the development of comprehensive security in the field. We appreciate in particular that the issue of Roma and Sinti and the fight against trafficking in human beings, both priorities of the Chairmanship, have been made the subject of substantive decisions. We also welcome the adoption of decisions on the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative and the OSCE's actions to combat terrorism. The European Union is also pleased at the outcome of the initiative of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary and Norway on the rule of law. We also welcome the fact that we have been able to adopt a decision on the legal framework of Organization, which will enable us to continue the discussion on this point. It has already made a good start through the activities of the informal working group, whose draft convention on the legal personality and legal capacity of the Organization would resolve many of the practical problems the OSCE faces on a daily basis. The European Union welcomes the adoption by the ministers of the two decisions submitted by the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) regarding small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition and regarding issues relevant to the FSC. These two decisions, which bring together the Forum's principal spheres of action, will constitute its road map for 2009.

On the other hand, the European Union truly regrets that it has not been possible to adopt a ministerial decision on the role of the OSCE in addressing the security implications of climate change. The OSCE does not intend to usurp the United Nations as the primary actor on this subject, but no one else will be able to give the matter the specific consideration that the Organization is capable of doing on the basis of its *acquis* and its experience in preventive security. We likewise regret the fact that the decision on further OSCE action in border security and management did not succeed.

The European Union welcomes the adoption in a constructive spirit of a statement regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which makes reference to the Basic Principles proposed to the parties last year in Madrid by the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group. The European Union urges the parties to finalize the Basic Principles over the next few months, to consolidate the ceasefire, in particular through the implementation of confidence-building measures, and to intensify their efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement based, as proposed in the Madrid document, on an appropriate combination of support for the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan, already expressed by the EU in its partnership and co-operation agreements and in its action plans for these two countries, with other OSCE principles, notably the non-use of force or threat of its use and the equal right of peoples to self-determination.

The European Union regrets that once again this year it has not been possible to adopt a regional statement on Moldova.

The European Union solemnly reaffirms its condemnation of the unilateral decision by Russia to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It urges the parties to continue to meet their commitments and intends to participate in the most active manner, through its special representative for the crisis in Georgia, in the international discussions launched on 15 October under the auspices of the EU, the United Nations and the OSCE. These discussions should make it possible to deal with all the remaining questions, in particular the modalities for security and stability in the region and the urgent question of displaced persons, including the question of the upper Kodori Valley and the Akhalkalaki region. Our actions must be aimed at promoting stability in the region. In this regard, the EU is not convinced that the deployment of thousands of soldiers and the establishment of military bases in the two separatist regions contributes to this objective. The peaceful and lasting settlement of the conflicts in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The European Union pays tribute to the outstanding work carried out in sometimes difficult conditions by the OSCE Mission to Georgia. We firmly believe that the OSCE should continue to play an important role in Georgia, including with regard to the conflicts, and urge all the participating States to take part in the constructive discussions to that end. We welcome the publication of the report by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on the worrying human rights situation in the conflict zones in Georgia. We encourage all the parties to co-operate with the ODIHR to implement the recommendations made in the report and fulfil their obligations.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate our appreciation to the Finnish Chairmanship for its outstanding efforts and its success throughout this year and for the splendid organization of this ministerial meeting. The European Union lends its full support in advance to the future Greek Chairmanship.

The candidate countries Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Norway, as well as 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.