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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1316th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

27 May 2021

In response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Claus Neukirch

The European Union welcomes Claus Neukirch, Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, and thanks him for his sixth report to the Permanent Council. We wish to thank the Mission once again for pursuing its work in spite of the challenges posed by COVID-19. We look forward to the forthcoming vaccination of the diplomatic Mission staff. We also support the Mission's gender mainstreaming efforts in accordance with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

The European Union reiterates its support for a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, with a special status for Transdniestria.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, full co-operation between the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol is more necessary than ever to protect the health of the people living on both banks of the Dniester, who are affected in equal measure by the coronavirus. We appreciate the co-operation between the two Sides in order to ensure the smooth running of the vaccination campaign.

We welcome the closure of the Transdniestrian checkpoints established in March 2020 in the Security Zone and the suspension of restrictions on freedom of movement between the two banks following the improvement in the epidemiological situation. We urge the self-proclaimed authorities of Transdniestria to take all the necessary steps to re-establish full freedom of movement between the two banks of the Dniester. We recall in this regard the undertakings in the "Berlin-plus package" regarding free movement in the region.

We also support the efforts by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to hold a new meeting in the "5+2" format, the only mechanism for achieving a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict. This would contribute, in accordance with the results-based approach, to a marked improvement in the life of the local populations, in particular new positive progress regarding respect for human rights and freedom of movement and the implementation of the confidence-building measures agreed on in Berlin in 2016 and in Vienna in 2017 and reaffirmed in Rome in 2018, with full respect for the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders. We welcome the proposal made by the Chairperson-in-Office during her visit to the region in February to host a meeting in the "5+2" format in Stockholm.

The European Union remains committed to respect for human rights and the full implementation of the confidence-building measures. We recall our concerns regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Transdniestrian region and emphasize the importance of respect for international standards and OSCE commitments as regards human rights and fundamental freedoms. With regard to the telecommunications sector, we continue to exhort the two Sides to resume constructive discussion and invite the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to reinstate the dialogue with the private operators concerned with a view to reaching a solution acceptable to all. In October 2020 we noted the positive developments regarding the situation of Latin-script schools in the Transdniestrian region. We are still counting on the Mission's support in closely monitoring the developments required for their normal and sustainable operation.

We expect tangible progress to be achieved in the three "baskets" of the agenda agreed for the negotiation process, in particular on the political, institutional and security aspects of the third basket.

We welcome the deployment by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of an election observation mission in the Republic of Moldova for the early parliamentary elections scheduled for 11 July and recall that all the necessary measures should be taken to guarantee the safety of the voters and observers in the face of the pandemic and the possibility for voting for all citizens who wish to do so. These elections should be held in a credible, inclusive and transparent manner with respect for democratic standards and the rule of law in accordance with the international commitments undertaken by the country and those it has subscribed to through the Association Agreement with the European Union.

Owing to the high risk posed by weapons and ammunition depots, particularly by the one in Cobasna, we have taken note of the statements by the Russian Federation announcing its intention to destroy the ammunition from this depot. We hope that this operation will take place as early as possible. We recall that the OSCE has a mandate and the means to contribute to the removal or destruction of Russian ammunition and armaments from the Transdniestrian region, and its involvement is essential to the transparency and international verification of these operations.

As indicated at the time of the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova with respect to the Operational Group of Russian Forces, we recall the importance of completing the process embarked on as part of the commitments undertaken at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999.

We call on the Mission to continue to monitor the situation in the Security Zone and to report regularly on incidents that occur there. We reiterate our appeal for strict adherence to the rules established by the Joint Control Commission in the Security Zone.

The European Union stands ready to support the authorities in Chişinău in the implementation of the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia, in order to strengthen the institutional functioning of this region within the Republic of Moldova.

The European Union remains shoulder to shoulder with the Republic of Moldova, and we shall continue to provide assistance, be it in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the Association Agreement, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, the visa exemption regime or aid in overcoming the COVID-19 epidemic and its socio-economic consequences. The European Union will continue to make this aid contingent on concrete reform results with a view to bringing tangible benefits to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Georgia and Andorra, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.