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**STATEMENT BY
THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1348th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 December 2021

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

The European Union welcomes Claus Neukirch, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, and thanks him for his seventh report to the Permanent Council. We wish to thank the Mission once again for going about its work efficiently in spite of the challenges posed by COVID-19.

The European Union reiterates its support for a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Transdnistrian 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 Transdnistria.

We commend the co-operation between the two Sides in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, including the provision of vaccines and other forms of assistance to the Transdnistrian region. We encourage them to continue on this path and to intensify their co-operation on other humanitarian issues for the benefit of the inhabitants on both banks of the Dniester.

We welcome the continued suspension of restrictions on movement between the two banks. We call upon the self-proclaimed authorities of Transdnistria to take all the necessary steps to permanently 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 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, and we hope that such a meeting can take place as soon as possible. This would enable specific improvements to be made when it comes to respect for human rights, freedom of movement and the full implementation of the package of confidence-building measures agreed on in Berlin in 2016 and in Vienna in 2017 and reaffirmed in Rome in 2018, while ensuring full respect for the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders. We welcome in this regard the growing number of exchanges between the two Sides this year at the level of the Chief Negotiators and the working groups, and also the proposal reiterated by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office during her visit to the Republic of Moldova on 6 October regarding the hosting of a meeting in the “5+2” format in Stockholm this year. We commend the personal efforts of the Chairperson-in-Office in 2021 to advance the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict, in particular during her visit to the Republic of Moldova on 6 October 2021.

The European Union remains committed to respect for human rights and the full implementation of the package of confidence-building measures. We recall our concerns about the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Moldovan region of Transdniestria, as described in detail in the report, and underline the importance of respect for international standards and OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms. We also support the continuation of dialogue on the situation regarding vehicles from the Transdniestrian region not covered by the 2018 agreement on licence plates. As for the telecommunications sector, we continue to exhort the two Sides to resume constructive discussion, and invite the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to restore dialogue with the private operators concerned with a view to reaching a solution acceptable to all.

Whereas in October 2020 we had noted positive developments in the situation of Latin-script schools in the Transdniestrian region, we must now lament the lack of progress on the restitution of school buildings in Rîbnița, Grigoriopol and Dubăsari, as emphasized in the Mission Head's report. 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".

In view of 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 soon as possible. We recall that the OSCE has a mandate and the means to assist in 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 such 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 promptly on any incidents occurring there. We reiterate our appeal for strict adherence to the rules established by the Joint Control Commission in the Security Zone.

We likewise support the Mission's efforts to step up its action on preventing domestic violence and to ensure gender mainstreaming in all its activities in accordance with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. Moreover, we commend the efforts in support of the women, peace and security agenda. We would be grateful to Mr. Neukirch if he could go into greater detail about the activities undertaken in these fields.

The European Union stands ready to support the Moldovan Government 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 citizens of the Republic of Moldova gave a clear and strong mandate to the Party of Action and Solidarity to set about implementing the ambitious programme of President Maia Sandu and of the Government led by Natalia Gavrilița. We firmly support the wide-ranging ambitions of President Sandu's programme of reforms, particularly as regards the rule of law, reform of the judicial system and combating corruption.

The European Union stands side by side with the Republic of Moldova, and we will continue to provide assistance, be it in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the Association Agreement, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area or the visa exemption regime or in connection with support in overcoming the COVID-19 epidemic and its socio-economic consequences. The European Union will continue to make this assistance contingent on concrete results of reform so as to ensure tangible benefits for 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 Ukraine, 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.