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**EU STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA, H.E. GIORGI GOMIASHVILI**

The EU welcomes His Excellency Giorgi Gomiashvili, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, to the meeting of the Permanent Council today.

The EU has listened with great attention to His Excellency's remarks with regard to the BMO. In the PC of 19 January, the EU expressed its strong support for a continuation of the BMO in Georgia. We underlined on previous occasions the BMO's importance for increasing transparency and stability in a volatile region. We consider the BMO a most valuable instrument for the participating States of the OSCE to work together on building confidence, preventing conflict and enhancing security in the area.

The host country, Georgia, has repeatedly stressed the usefulness and necessity of the BMO, indicating that both Georgia and Russia have benefited from the operation and could continue to do so. In the Permanent Council of 19 January, the Georgian delegation underlined that the extension of the BMO would greatly contribute to the strengthening of cooperation, understanding and confidence in the relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation. The EU cannot but support this goal.

In its statement of 18 January 2005, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that international monitoring of the most volatile section of the Russian-Georgian state border should be maintained and is crucial for keeping peace and stability in the region. Today, His Excellency Giorgi Gomiashvili, has underlined the need for constructive cooperation and transparency on this important stretch of the border. The EU is ready to explore all possible options that would support this objective.

In this respect, the EU again urges the parties concerned to agree to a renewal of the BMO mandate. Furthermore, and in addition to the BMO, the option of training of Georgian Border Guards is worth exploring taking into account the experience gathered with the BMO.

Therefore, the EU would welcome the development of supplementary activities in this direction and welcomes in that regard the Georgian request for training as a possible new component to Monitoring.

The EU is aware of the recent statements by the Russian delegation regarding the BMO. We nevertheless hope that a solution acceptable to all participating States can be found in the nearest possible future. Clearly there is a need for further measures to increase security, stability and mutual confidence in the Caucasus region. In this context, the BMO can fulfil a valuable contribution. The EU will carefully study all that has been suggested by the Georgian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and reserves the right to get back to these issues in the near future.

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

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