Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the World and European Water Day (22 March)

"Today, the European Union is celebrating the 17th World Water Day and the 2nd annual European Water Day. Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are essential if people are to live healthily and with dignity. There is no room for complacency: 884 million people across the world lack access to improved water sources, while more than 2.6 billion people lack access to acceptable sanitation.

All countries bear the responsibility to realize that people enjoy their full human rights, and that they have equal access to health care, education, safe drinking water and sanitation, social and other basis services. The EU acknowledges the recent recognition of the human right to water and sanitation by the UN General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council's specification that this right is part of the human right to an adequate standard of living.

The EU welcomes the theme of this year's World Water Day: “Water for Cities”. Rapid population growth in cities in the developing world is putting additional pressure on infrastructure and services, with particularly tragic consequences for slum dwellers and homeless people. Among the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, the international community pledged to provide safe drinking water and sanitation to billions more people by 2015. The EU presented the Millennium Development Goals Initiative last year, which provides an extra €1 billion for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and has a focus on water and sanitation. We welcome similar steps by a number of EU Member States and other countries, which aim to close the still widening gap between water supply and demand."
The Candidate Countries Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Iceland*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia align themselves with this declaration

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.