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Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on 15 September

The EU pays tribute to all defenders of democracy who suffer threats, persecution, and even risk imprisonment and attempts to their lives whilst standing up for democracy and democratic principles. Democracy is at the core of what the European Union is about. It is not only one of the founding principles of the European Union but democracy support is a declared policy objective of the EU's External Policy, as recently confirmed by the Council of the European Union¹.

Democracy, human rights, security, governance and sustainable development are intrinsically linked. Democratic principles have their roots in universal norms and values, and democracy itself has been affirmed as a universal value by the UN Summit Outcome Document of 2005. Democratic principles and values are also key to sustain poverty alleviation, economic development and gender equality in the long term. They are a prerequisite for government accountability and transparency, to sustain an independent judiciary, free media and a framework for protecting human rights. They are also the most basic form of crisis management and conflict prevention.

¹ Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations – Towards Increased Coherence and Effectiveness adopted on 18 November 2009

P R E S S

The EU, with its unique history and experience, itself demonstrates that democracies bring about peace, development and prosperity. The EU does not believe that democracy can be exported or imposed, but democratic development and consolidation in third countries can be supported. There is no one single model of democracy. Democracy must come from within and be shaped by each society, based on universal principles, but taking into account the unique historic, geographic and cultural context of that society. The EU has many instruments at its disposal to support democracy and democratic actors around the world, and is looking forward to a more coherent, consistent and efficient use of these instruments.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* and Iceland⁺, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 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.