EU Statement

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First Committee

Thematic Discussion on Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery remains a grave threat to international peace and security. While the international treaty regimes and export controls arrangements have slowed down the spread of WMD and their delivery systems, a number of States have sought or are seeking to develop such weapons, and the risk that terrorists could access such weapons, material or means of delivery is real.

The flagrant use of chemical weapons in recent years shows that the prohibition and the global norm against the use of these weapons are under threat. Decisive action is needed to ensure the integrity and full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Preventing impunity and re-emergence of chemical weapons should be at the heart of our endeavours during this First Committee session.

The EU will devote significant attention to this issue as a supporter of Action 9 of the UN Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament that calls to restore respect for the global norm against chemical weapons. We reiterate that any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, be it a State or a non-State actor, under any circumstances is unacceptable and violates international law and norms and that those responsible for their use must be held accountable.

We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to fully honour its obligations as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, extend full cooperation to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), declare the chemical weapons it still possesses, and take substantive action to destroy its chemical weapons programme in a complete and irreversible manner. We remain gravely concerned with the findings from the recent report of the OPCW Director-General which concluded that the Technical Secretariat is still not in a position to verify Syrian compliance with the declarations requirements in the Convention due to unresolved identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic.

We stress our full trust in the professional, impartial and objective work of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Following the Russian veto against extension of the mandate of the

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which confirmed that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces were responsible for three chemical attacks, and Da’esh for one, the international community had to pursue other avenues to identify the perpetrators of the chemical weapon attacks. The EU therefore strongly supported the June 2018 Decision on “Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use” taken by the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties to the CWC. We welcome the establishment of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) and commend the OPCW Technical Secretariat for the progress made to date. We look forward to the issuing of the IIT’s first report, which will be an important step towards identifying those responsible for chemical weapons use in Syria, with the ultimate goal of bringing the perpetrators to justice. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the IIT.

The EU also actively participates in the work of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, launched in Paris in January 2018. Since October 2018, the EU has in place a dedicated sanctions regime against the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. This regime is not country-specific and enables the EU to impose restrictive measures on persons and entities involved in the development and use of chemical weapons anywhere, regardless of their nationality and location. The sanctions can extend to those providing financial, technical or material support.

On 21 January 2019, the EU imposed sanctions on nine individuals and one entity under the new regime. These designations included the two GRU officials, and the Head and Deputy Head of the GRU (also known as the G.U., or the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces) responsible for possession, transport and use in Salisbury (UK) of a toxic nerve agent. Sanctions were also imposed on a Syrian entity responsible for the development and production of chemical weapons, the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), as well as five Syrian officials directly involved in the SSRC’s activities.

The EU provides significant support for the OPCW’s activities, with voluntary contributions amounting to EUR 57 million since 2004. The latest EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/538, adopted by our Ministers on 1 April 2019, offers funding to seven projects, notably the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology and implementation of Decision on addressing the threat from chemical weapons use; chemical demilitarisation and non-proliferation; assistance and protection in African States Parties; international cooperation; universality and outreach; national implementation; and science and technology.

We once again call upon those States not yet party – the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Egypt, Israel and South Sudan – to join the Chemical Weapons Convention without further delay, thus contributing to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Mr. Chair,

The ongoing intersessional process of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), with technical expert discussions on all relevant issues, has contributed to increasing our
collective understanding of the risks and ways to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons. At the same time, the financial situation of the BTWC remains extremely precarious due to the accumulation of arrears and continued late payments of assessed contributions by certain States Parties. Once again, we urge all States, which have not yet done so, to honour their financial obligations without delay.

We reaffirm our strong support for the BTWC, the global norm against biological weapons, and recall the EU’s longstanding efforts to strengthen this important Convention. A new EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/97 of 21 January 2019 provides funding to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) for six projects in support of BTWC universalisation, capacity development for BTWC implementation, biosecurity networks in the Global South, the intersessional programme and preparations for the Ninth Review Conference in 2021, preparedness of States Parties to prevent and respond to attacks involving biological agents, and tools for outreach, education and engagement.

The EU and its Member States have also invested in improving the operational capabilities of the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism, which is currently the only investigative tool in place in case of a biological weapon incident. We look forward to further cooperation with the UN to develop a stronger international capacity to investigate any alleged use of biological or toxin weapons and to ensure that any illegal acts will be quickly detected.

Furthermore, we would like to highlight the regional EU Centres of Excellence on the mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risks, which offer capacity-building assistance and support for large-scale cross-border exercises to already more than 60 countries, with the budget of EUR 250 million for 2010-20. We encourage all interested countries to carry out CBRN risk and needs assessments and prepare CBRN action plans.

The EU underlines the continued key importance of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and its follow-on Resolutions, which establish legally-binding obligations for all States to prevent and deter non-State actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery and related materials. The EU’s capacity-building assistance in support of UNSCR 1540 has significantly helped States to fulfil their reporting obligations and facilitated cooperation between relevant stakeholders.

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States continue to support the Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the Proliferation Security Initiative.

The EU reaffirms its full support for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other WMD and their delivery systems in the Middle East. As stated in the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan, such zones can only be established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at between all States of the region concerned. In order to build a conducive atmosphere and contribute to an inclusive process, EU Ministers adopted a new EU Council Decision in June
2019 in support of a process of confidence-building leading to the establishment of a WMD free
zone in the Middle East. We are grateful to the UN Institute for Disarmament Research
(UNIDIR) for implementing the projects and launching this initiative at a side event during the
First Committee session. We call on all States in the region, which have not yet done so, to join
the NPT, the CWC and the BTWC, and to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban
Treaty as an important confidence- and security-building measure.

Mr. Chair,

Proliferation of delivery systems related to WMD, in particular the pursuit by several countries
of concern of ballistic missile programmes, is a continued cause for concern. We call for the
immediate dismantlement of such programmes.

The EU underlines the importance of Iran abiding by the provisions of all relevant UN Security
Council Resolution, notably 2231 including its Annex B, which calls upon Iran not to undertake
any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons,
including launches using such ballistic missile technology. Any such activity would be
inconsistent with Resolution 2231 and contribute to instability in the region.

The repeated ballistic missile launches by the DPRK represent a grave threat to regional and
international peace and security and violate multiple UN Security Council Resolutions. We call
on the DPRK to immediately halt all its launches and fully comply with all its international
obligations and commitments. The EU recalls that all UN Member States are obliged to
implement the restrictions targeting the DPRK’s illegal activities as imposed by the UN Security
Council and should do their utmost to curb proliferation of goods and technology which could
contribute to the DPRK’s nuclear, other weapons of mass destruction or ballistic missile-related
programmes, including the transfer of dual-used items and their financing.

The EU and its Member States strongly support The Hague Code of Conduct (HCoC) which is
the only multilateral transparency and confidence-building instrument related to ballistic
missiles. We call on all States, in particular those with significant activities in the area of ballistic
missiles and space launch vehicles, to adhere to the Code as soon as possible. The EU actively
promotes the universalisation, full implementation and efficient functioning of the Code. We are
supportive of examining further multilateral steps to prevent the threat of missile proliferation
and to promote disarmament efforts in the missile field.

We recall that the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) plays a crucial role in tackling
the proliferation of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)
technologies and that all EU Member States should be allowed to participate in its work. The EU
strongly supports the MTCR and other international export control regimes, such the Australia
Group, the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement. Altogether 36 countries
from six regions have benefited from the EU Partner-to-Partner (P2P) Export Control
Programme for Dual-Use Goods, with projects worth more than EUR 35 million since 2004.
Thank you, Mr. Chair