

**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BRANDUSA PREDESCU
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ROMANIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 90th SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(THE HAGUE, 12 – 15 MARCH 2019)**

Madame Chair,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia and Turkey, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement. Andorra and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

1. The European Union pays tribute to Ambassador Jana Reinisova from the Czech Republic, for her leadership as Chairperson in guiding the meetings of the Executive Council during her tenure. We thank the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias for his comprehensive report to the Executive Council and express our full confidence in the professionalism, capacity and expertise of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS). The EU looks forward to continuing its close cooperation with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Director-General as the Organisation plays a crucial role in upholding the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Madame Chair,

2. The European Union reiterates that any use of chemical weapons (CW) anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable. We express the strong conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable. Impunity for the use of chemical weapons can never be tolerated.

3. We express our grave concern at the findings of the FFM regarding the Incident of Alleged Use of Toxic Chemicals as a Weapon in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018. The FFM report S/1731/2019, dated 1 March 2019, concludes that the evaluation and analysis of all information gathered by the FFM provide reasonable grounds that the use of toxic chemical as a weapon took place. We commend the work and professionalism of the FFM. This work is essential for paving the way for further steps to identify the perpetrators of these reprehensible attacks.

4. The European Union reiterates its strong support for the work of the FFM and it also recognises the importance of the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The Director-General's Note on "Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme", dated 25 February 2019, concludes that during the reporting period, the TS did not receive any additional information from the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the outstanding issues. The Technical Secretariat therefore remains unable to resolve all of the identified gaps, inconsistencies, or discrepancies in the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, and therefore cannot fully verify that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the CWC and Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1. It is a matter of serious concern to the EU that five years after acceding to the CWC the Syrian Arab Republic has still not provided an adequate Declaration.

5. Further to the findings of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism in 2016 and 2017, and as noted in Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, the EU underlines its concern that the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic, by direct implication, establishes that the Syrian Arab Republic failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons and CW production facilities (CWPFs) and demands that the Syrian Arab Republic immediately cease all use of CW and declare all of the CW it possesses, including sarin and its precursors, as well as CWPFs.

6. On 28 May 2018, the Council of the EU renewed the restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2019. As of 4 March 2019, the sanctions list includes 277 persons and 72 entities. Some of the measures in question are meant to counter chemical weapons proliferation and use as well as to sanction those responsible for chemical attacks and chemical weapons development.

7. We take this occasion also to recall that in October 2018 the EU Council established autonomous and horizontal sanctions against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. On 21 January this year the EU Council imposed sanctions on four persons responsible for possession, transport and use in Salisbury, UK, of a toxic nerve agent, and one entity responsible for the development and production of CW in Syria as well as five persons involved in the entity's activities.

Madame Chair,

8. The European Union strongly supports reinforcing the global norm prohibiting chemical weapons taking into account that it has repeatedly been violated, including just a year ago on European soil.

9. To this end, the EU welcomed in June 2018 the adoption by the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 entitled "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use". It is a crucial step to further deter the use of chemical weapons. The adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2019 by the States Parties in November 2018 (CSP-23) was a clear and concrete expression of support to the implementation of the Decision.

10. We thank the Director-General for his report to the Executive Council on the progress made in the implementation of Decision and welcome the establishment of the Investigation and Identification Team as a notable step in this regard. We would like to assure the Technical Secretariat of the continued commitment of the European Union to the full implementation of the Decision. We look forward to hearing from the Head of the Team about the planned activities in the

coming weeks and stand ready to support the Technical Secretariat's efforts, inter alia, through an EU Council Decision, including voluntary contributions.

11. The European Union welcomes the Executive Council Decision EC-M-62/DEC.1 recommending to all States Parties the adoption of the proposal jointly submitted by Canada, the Netherlands and the United States of America to add two families of toxic chemicals to Schedule I of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention. We regret that it was not possible to reach consensus on the separate proposal tabled by the Russian Federation on 25 February, noting that the EU could have supported the proposal had it been amended in line with the comprehensive evaluation conducted by the Technical Secretariat.

Madame Chair,

12. The European Union will continue to support the universalisation and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The EU is considering a further and major financial contribution in support of the OPCW core activities in the context of preparations for a new EU Council Decision. We believe that the capacity building is essential to assist States Parties in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. The EU stands ready to continue and expand its support to the capacity-building efforts at national and regional level. We will continue to support outreach activities to engage all relevant stakeholders such as chemical industry, think tanks, academia, civil society organisations and NGOs, for cooperation, synergies and awareness-raising purposes.

13. The transformation of the OPCW Laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology will provide a qualitative leap in the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection and capacity-building. The unique size and importance of the project also represents a significant project management challenge for the OPCW which will require sustained TS commitment to deliver. We call on all States Parties to support the project. We commend the initiative of the Ambassadors of Canada and of Indonesia in helping to express and channel this support through the establishment of an informal group "Friends of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology". The European Union is considering a major financial contribution to support the establishment of the Centre.

14. The European Union recognises that the OPCW Director-General needs to have flexibility to retain special expertise and capabilities for its effective functioning. We therefore encourage the setting-up of a facilitation with a view to an update report to be delivered to the EC-91 and EC-92. The report should inform on discussions and provide elements for a way-forward on an OPCW tenure policy and related human resources issues such as staff recruitment, geographical and gender balance of staff, JPO and internship programmes.

15. I would kindly ask you, Madame Chair, to distribute this statement as an official document of the 90th session of the Executive Council and to post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you, Madame Chair.