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Changing age structures of populations
and their implications for development

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

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1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia¹ and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration. Since this is the first time for the European Union to take the floor during this session, let me congratulate you and the other Bureau members on their election.

2. During this session, our discussions will be focused on the changing age structures of populations and their implications for sustainable development. The EU is willing to engage in an open and constructive dialogue and hopes that it will raise our awareness and knowledge of the multidimensional effects - challenges as well as opportunities - of changing age structures in the context of the development process. We believe that this can best be addressed by focussing on its impacts with regard to human development and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. In this context the *Programme of Action* of the ICPD and the *Key Actions for Further Implementation of the Programme of Action* provide the guidelines for the work of the Commission. The EU reaffirms its support and commitment to their full implementation.

3. Age structures of populations differ from region to region and from country to country. While some countries have a growing population and an increasing number of younger people, more and more countries are facing decreasing populations with a growing share of older persons or have populations that are growing and ageing at the same time. The United Nations Population Division has been continuously observing the development of the world population and the inherent dynamics of population processes. The data given in the current *World Population Prospects* indicate that the populations in Europe and many other regions are ageing. The estimates also show a close linkage of the decline of fertility and increasing longevity to the ageing of populations. By 1950-1955, the more developed regions had reaped the benefits of such advances, reaching a life expectancy at birth of 66 years for both sexes combined. Since then, their life expectancy has continued to increase to reach 76 years in 2005-2010. As a result of these demographic changes, the median age increased by almost 10 years from 29 in 1950 to 38,6 years in 2005. The share of people 65 years and older nearly doubled from 7.9% to 15.3%, and the share of people over 80 years even trebled since 1950. A majority of these are elderly women.

4. The fact that people throughout the world live longer should be seen as an opportunity for both individuals and societal development. On the other hand, the process of ageing has a

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

wide range of economic and societal impacts. In this context some key challenges for the EU and its Member States have been identified, namely:

- managing the economic implications of ageing in order to maintain economic growth and sound public finances;
- adjusting to an ageing and shrinking workforce;
- ensuring and/or adjusting adequate, sustainable and flexible security systems
- achieving access to high quality health care for all members of a society while ensuring the financial viability of health care systems.

5. To meet these challenges, a wide variety of policy responses have already been developed or are being envisaged by the Member States of the EU, for example changing retirement ages, reforming pension systems, adjusting health care systems, improving residential and institutional care, promoting life long learning and establishing activity centres for older persons. In this context, it is important to fully mobilize the active population through family friendly policies that support parents in combining work and parental roles. In view of the challenges of the future, EU countries are aware that these policies have to be supplemented and further developed.

6. Already today, Europe is considered the “oldest” region in the world. In addition to the steady decline in births and of numbers of young people in most EU countries, the number of older and, especially of very old persons is continuously increasing. Current trends indicate that the ageing of populations throughout Europe will continue.

7. We cannot address the issue of ageing in isolation from other areas of policy making. The European Union's response to ageing is therefore designed as part of an overall strategy of mutually reinforcing policies encompassing its economic, employment, social and cultural implications. Resources and experiences of older generations can be of great benefit for the economy and society. Increasing the rate of employment - especially for women and men aged over 55 – is therefore a very important element of the *European Employment Strategy*. The EU's *Broad Economic Policy Guidelines* provide the framework for policy recommendations and for monitoring the implementation of these recommendations and calls for its Member States to develop comprehensive strategies.

8. The EU response to the challenges of ageing societies is directed at active ageing policies and practices and aims at mobilising the full potential of people of all ages, women and men alike and promoting a new solidarity between generations. Such policies include the promotion of life long learning, improvement of working conditions, encouragement of activities after retirement including health sustaining activities. They are aimed at raising the

quality of life of individuals as well as contributing to larger growth, lower burdens and substantial cost savings in pensions and health care at societal level. Their implementation requires the substantial involvement of all stakeholders including civil society, in a spirit of dialogue and partnership.

9. The process of ageing will not be confined to developed countries. As we move through the 21st century more and more countries - including those which currently still have a young and growing population - will experience the implications of substantial ageing processes. In fact, many developing countries are already in the early stages of adapting to the changing age structure of their populations.

10. Although situations differ among countries and regions, we can learn and benefit from each other's experiences. To do so, international mechanisms that can best inform public policies around the world should be strengthened. In our view, six key issues require particular attention:

- Firstly: the social security systems of societies have to be adapted to the demographic changes in sustainable ways,
- Secondly: sufficient labour forces have to be secured; this includes promoting conditions that enable people to be economically active as long as they can and wish,
- Thirdly: managing cost implications for public sector finances and economies at large including particular risks for fiscal stability and overall economic sustainability,
- Fourthly: addressing the issue of poverty and social exclusion in old age, which remains a serious problem in some countries of the world, where many older persons, especially women, have not got sufficient access to basic income, health and social welfare provision,
- Fifthly: enhancing the ability of families to support older family members,
- Sixthly: supporting the ability of older persons to care for family members, victims of HIV/AIDS and their children.

11. While populations in most developed countries are ageing, many developing countries currently still face population growth as well as a fast increase of the number of young people. 1.5 billion young people aged 12-24 years live worldwide, 1.3 billion of them in developing countries. Never before in history has there been such a large number of young people. This development is exacerbated by the effect the HIV/Aids epidemic has on the structure of the population in many developing countries, notably in Africa, and the challenges it poses to the economic and social stability in the most affected countries.

In this context, it is vital to equip young people with the means to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and to provide and improve the necessary services to this end in accordance with the ICPD, thereby preventing the further spread of HIV/AIDS and millions of unwanted pregnancies. We welcome the African Union Maputo

Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights² of January 2007 as an important milestone in this regard. We further welcome the commitment of Heads of State and Government made at the World Summit 2005 to achieve “universal access to reproductive health by 2015, as set out at the ICPD” and to integrate “this goal in strategies to attain the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, aimed at reducing maternal mortality, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, promoting gender equality, combating HIV/AIDS and eradicating poverty.”

12. The European Union is strongly committed to promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction in developing countries. In many developing countries changes in the age structure resulting from declining birth rates offer a window of opportunity: the dependency ratio for young people is declining while old age dependency is not yet increasing and the proportion of the population in working age is unusually high. This window of opportunity has been used by some countries for significant economic growth together with investments in education and infrastructure.

13. It is crucial to address the particular needs of young people in the context of development. We have to create jobs for them, invest in their future and involve them in decision making processes, as has been pointed out by the *World Bank World Development Report 2007*. The opportunities young people have and the decisions they will take will determine our common future. If we want a more prosperous and peaceful world, we must focus more strongly on youth, and equality between male and female – in particular in the context of globalisation, human security and sustainable development.

14. The European Union has recently formulated the memorandum *Towards a EU-Strategy on the Rights of the Child* (2006), aiming at promoting childrens’ rights in policy dialogue. Correspondingly, promoting children and youth and improving their conditions is one of the six focal areas of the EU programme *Investing in People*. In the *European Consensus on Development*, the EU has committed itself to integrate child rights in all its activities. In all of its country and regional strategies, the EU will address child rights. Currently the European Commission is developing an action plan for children in external relations. The new strategy aims at integrating present child rights activities in all instruments of development cooperation and external relations of the European Union.

We also see a need for young Europeans to benefit from a set of policies and measures aimed at promoting greater demographic dynamism, improved social and vocational integration and fuller utilisation of the human potential embodied by the European youth. To this end, the European Union adopted in March 2005 a Youth Pact encompassing a broad

² MAPUTO PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE CONTINENTAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

range of lines of action in the areas of employment, integration and social advancement, education, training and mobility and reconciliation of working life and family life.

15. As the international community recognised at Cairo, improving the status of women enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction. This in turn is essential for the long-term success of population programmes. The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community.

Key to improve the status of women is to eliminate the widespread acts of violence committed against them. The EU welcomes the excellent study of the Secretary-General on all forms of violence against women published last year. It contains a number of key recommendations for action by Member States to address the causes and consequences of violence against women. As the study highlights, violence places women at a considerably higher risk for poor physical and reproductive health. It is imperative therefore that access to a full range of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care and services in accordance with the ICPD, including in the area of HIV/AIDS, are integrated into all strategies to address and respond to violence against women.

Last year's General Assembly resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, adopted in response to the Secretary-General's study, presents a strong platform for intensified action on all levels and by all stakeholders. As recognised in that resolution, the EU considers it essential that the issue of violence against women is addressed across all UN fora and to acknowledge the impact that violence against women has on social and economic development. The EU, therefore, looks forward to being able to address this issue at this Commission in more detail in the future.

16. Concluding my statement, I would like to also point out that policy responses are first and foremost the responsibility of each country. However, cooperation within the framework of the UN is crucial to share experience and to learn from best practices throughout the world, keeping in mind the diversity of national situations. The European Union encourages the international community to share their experiences and collaborate in the development of future strategies during this session.