Mr Chairman,

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

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Montenegro*, Serbia* 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.

Let me start by congratulating you on your chairmanship and commend you for your relentless efforts to secure the holding of the 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) despite the critical financial situation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

The EU reaffirms its strong support for the BTWC as a key pillar of the rules-based international system that facilitates multilateral cooperation.

The current financial situation of the BTWC - mainly caused by the accumulation of arrears and continued late payments of assessed contributions by certain States Parties – is of deep concern to the EU. It undermines our collective efforts to strengthen this important Convention, promote its universalisation and ensure its full and effective implementation. Once again, we urge those States who have not yet done so to comply with their financial obligations without further delay.

* Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
We recall that the 2018 Meeting of States Parties is mandated to take necessary measures with respect to budgetary and financial matters with a view to ensuring the proper implementation of the intersessional programme. Financial stability is essential if we are to convene the agreed BTWC meetings and enable the continued functioning of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) at least until the next Review Conference in 2021. We welcome the work you have carried out, in cooperation with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and in consultation with States Parties, to address the financial predictability and sustainability for the meetings of the States Parties and for the ISU. We are ready to consider the proposed measures provided that they are designed in a way that does not ease the pressure for full and timely payments of assessed contributions by all States. We encourage all actors to engage constructively and join consensus on such measures to improve financial stability short- and long-term.

Mr Chairman,

We continue actively supporting universal adherence to the BTWC and call on all States not yet party to the Convention to adhere thereto without further delay. We welcome the ongoing progress with new accessions and ratifications and thank the MSP Chair and the ISU for their work in this regard.

There is an urgent need to strengthen States’ capacities to counter the possibility of the use of biological or toxin weapons by a State or by non-State actors – a threat that might be growing in view of the dual use potential of specific developments in life sciences which could be misused for malign purposes.

The EU welcomes the unanimous approval by the Assembly of States Parties of the amendment to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), establishing the use of biological weapons as a war crime under Article 8. This amendment reinforces the international norm against the use of biological weapons and we call upon all States to join the ICC and to sign and ratify this amendment.

The EU’s priorities within the BTWC include enhancing national implementation and compliance, promoting confidence-building and transparency measures such as peer-reviews,
voluntary visits and other initiatives, facilitating cooperation on science and technology, operationalising Article V consultative provisions and Article VII provisions on assistance, response and preparedness, as well as promoting universal adherence to the Convention.

We welcome the start of the intersessional process and were encouraged by the recent technical and substantive discussions that took place during the August Meetings of Experts (MX). The MX reports as well as the summaries prepared under the responsibility of respective Chairs provide a wealth of suggestions and ideas that should be used as a stepping stone in the preparations of subsequent intersessional meetings in the run up to the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. We would like to thank the MX chairs for identifying possible outcomes in a concrete and structured manner.

In particular, we welcome the proposal by France and India to establish a database for assistance under Article VII and the proposal by South Africa on guidelines in the same framework. Such proposals have been subject to discussion for several years in the BTWC, including during the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. We support taking further action on these suggestions as well as on any other proposal that would receive consensual support during the 2018 MSP.

Mr Chairman,

While recognising that there is no consensus regarding verification at this stage, which remains a central element of a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, we will continue to promote options that contribute to an increase in confidence in compliance with the Convention and to the effective implementation of the object and purpose of the BTWC.

We call on all States Parties to support the ongoing efforts to enhancing transparency and building confidence in compliance, including through necessary revisions to the current Confidence-Building Measures (CBM). Submitting full and regular CBM declarations is of utmost importance and States Parties should ensure timely submission of these annual reports. This should be made even easier by the new e-CBM facility.
The EU and its Member States continue to promote voluntary peer review exercises and other voluntary visits and transparency initiatives in the context of the BTWC. Their objective is not to replace legally-binding verification measures, but to enhance transparency and to allow sharing of information and good practices on national implementation regarding, for instance, capabilities, activities and actions for implementation, and to provide reassurance on compliance. We are ready to cooperate in this regard and would like to encourage all States Parties to consider conducting or participating in such initiatives.

We congratulate Georgia on the recent successful peer review transparency visit to the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi. We recall that the visiting team, composed of 22 experts and officials coming from 17 BTWC States Parties, the EU, ISU and civil society concluded in its report that the facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. Tuesday’s (4 December) side event on the peer review visit to Georgia also provided an outlook on the EU’s support for such initiatives.

The EU calls on States Parties to utilise fully the Article X database which is an effective tool to facilitate full implementation of Article X of the Convention on cooperation and assistance.

Mr Chairman,

Let me also take this opportunity to inform of the current status of the EU’s fourth assistance programme laid down in EU Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP. We are grateful to the ISU for their continued professional implementation of the EU-funded activities in support of universalisation and implementation of the Convention, to which experts from several EU Member States have contributed. The activities in 2018 include an universalisation visit to Haiti, regional universalisation workshops in Djibouti and in Addis Ababa as well as regional workshops on science and technology developments in Mexico, Jordan, South Africa and the Philippines. Legislative, biorisk management and export control workshops have taken place in most of the 10 BTWC States Parties selected for the extended assistance programmes, notably Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Yemen. We would like to invite all interested parties to attend the EU side event on Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP to learn more about these projects and possible next steps on Wednesday, 5 December 2018 at 13:00.
The EU remains committed to continuing support to the BTWC in the framework of its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Other EU instruments include the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative which provides assistance to more than 60 countries in 8 regions, with the budget of 250 million EUR for the period of 2010-20. We would like to invite all States to carry out CBRN risk and needs assessments and prepare CBRN action plans.

Thank you, Mr Chairman