Mr. President,
I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. [Aligning clause]
Let me start by extending my congratulation to India for assuming the first Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2024. I wish India every success in its endeavour to guide the CD at its opening and convey our full support. We hope that all P6 Presidencies will be cooperating and coordinating the preparations in the same transparent, predictable and continuous manner as we witnessed during the 2023 session.

Mr. President,
Upholding the rules-based international order founded on the UN Charter remains a key priority for the EU as the international community confronts a global security landscape marked by heightened tensions and complex geopolitical challenges. The world faces unprecedented security risks and uncertainties, dominated by Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East.

The EU reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms the EU’s unwavering support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence. Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for waging an illegal war of aggression against Ukraine and for other most serious crimes under international law. The EU condemns Russia’s actions, irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and threats to use nuclear force in its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the agreement by Russia and Belarus to allow the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus, which further exacerbates already heightened tensions. Through its reckless acts against nuclear safety and security in Ukraine, Russia has added to the gravity of the threats and challenges facing Ukraine and the international community; once again, we urge Russia to heed the resolutions by the IAEA Board of Governors and IAEA General Conference.
We condemn the continued military support for Russia provided by Iran, Belarus and the DPRK, and we continue to urge all countries not to provide material or other support for Russia’s illegal war of aggression. In this context, the transfer of ballistic missiles, along with any other arms and related materiel, from the DPRK to Russia flagrantly violates multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) – namely, resolutions 1695 (2006), 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), and 2270 (2016) – resolutions which Russia itself supported. We call on the DPRK and Russia to abide by relevant UNSCRs and to immediately cease all activities that violate them.

The EU strongly condemns the DPRK for its launches of ballistic missiles. The DPRK must cease these illegal and dangerous launches, which continued unabated throughout 2023 and show no sign of slowing in 2024. They blatantly violate UN Security Council resolutions-and undermine regional and international peace and security. The DPRK cannot and will never have the status of a nuclear weapon state in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The EU urges the DPRK to return immediately to full compliance with the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, bring into force the Additional Protocol and sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The DPRK must abandon all its nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missile programmes and existing nuclear programmes, in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner and cease all related activities. The EU is ready to work with all partners in promoting a meaningful diplomatic process aimed at building sustainable peace and security through the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

With regard to our concern over the situation in the Middle East, the position of the EU and its Member States is outlined in relevant Council Conclusions.

Mr. President,

Effective multilateralism and a well-functioning multilateral system are more important than ever. The urgency to address current challenges amplifies the significance of advancing disarmament objectives and maintaining global peace and security.

The EU and its Member States remain deeply concerned that the Conference on Disarmament (CD), as a single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, has been deadlocked for so long. The failure to adopt a Programme of Work or even the opposition of one Member State to allow the participation of a large number of observer States in the work of the CD is unacceptable. Strong political will and flexibility are required from all CD members if we are to break the impasse and bring the CD back on track. Despite the known challenges, we must advance technical, substantive work and broaden areas of agreement so that we are better prepared to start negotiations. We must modernise our working methods, noting proposals emerging from the constructive joint discussions in Montreux last summer hosted by Germany and France and organised by UNIDIR, to avoid protracted procedural debates on the organisation of work and be faithful to the principles of multilateralism guiding our work – inclusivity and cooperation.
Our priorities for the upcoming year remain unchanged. We stay united in our unequivocal support for the NPT as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI and an important element in the development of nuclear energy applications for peaceful purposes. We reiterate the EU’s strong, resolute and continuous support for all three pillars of the NPT and will continue to promote comprehensive, balanced and substantive full implementation of the 2010 Review Conference Action Plan, which is a collective responsibility shared by all State Parties to the NPT without exception. We stress the need to implement all obligations under the NPT, and commitments from previous Review Conferences, including the need for concrete progress towards the full implementation of Article VI, with the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The EU stresses the importance of universalising the NPT and calls on all States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty as non-nuclear weapon States and, pending their accession, to adhere to its terms. Although disappointed by no outcome at the recent Working Group on further strengthening the NPT Review process, we were encouraged by the constructive, and meaningful engagement last year of an overwhelming majority of States Parties, including some nuclear weapons states. We will build on the discussions and constructively pursue the NPT Review Process. We will actively contribute to achieving a tangible outcome in the upcoming Second Session of the Preparatory Committee to take place in July in Geneva.

Promoting universal adherence to and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a key priority for the EU. The EU deeply deplores the Russia’s decision to revoke its ratification of the CTBT. The EU calls on Russia to continue to respect the object and purpose of the Treaty. Furthermore, we call on all States that have not yet done so, in particular those listed in Annex 2, to sign and ratify the CTBT without preconditions or further delay.

The EU underscores the urgency and significance of advancing the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) through the actions agreed within the framework of the UNGA Resolution 78/28 supported by 155 States. We stand ready to support the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament of a Treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive devices, in accordance with document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. Pending a future FMCT in force, the EU calls on China and all other States concerned to declare and uphold an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear devices in order to contribute to our collective efforts towards nuclear disarmament. We urge all CD Member States to adopt a program of work in 2024, which would include the commencement of negotiations on the FMCT.

All EU Member States supported the resolution on the Prohibition of radiological weapons adopted at the last UNGA First Committee. The EU is committed to prevent the development and the use of these destructive weapons and encourage all CD Member States to adopt a program of work in 2024, which include the commencement of negotiations to conclude a legally binding multilateral prohibition of the use of radiological weapons.

Mr. President,
Artificial intelligence, autonomy in weapons systems, and cyber capabilities reshape the landscape of conflict. It is imperative that we collectively address these challenges by establishing principles, international norms and regulations to ensure the responsible use of such technologies. Over the past decade, the international community has made clear that the international rules-based order also applies to states’ behaviour in these domains. The EU encourages further engagement in international dialogue and cooperation to address the opportunities and challenges presented by AI in the military domain. We support efforts at relevant fora to exchange best practices and foster a common understanding of the legal and ethical implications.

Outer space has witnessed a surge in security challenges over recent years with threats and perceived threats multiplying. The EU and its Member States are actively engaged in promoting the preservation of a safe, secure and sustainable space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis for all, for present and future generations. While reaffirming the importance of developing legally-binding norms to prevent an arms race in outer space, the EU and its Member States believe that an approach based on behaviours is the most pragmatic and immediate way forward to make progress on PAROS and improve space security, using a step by step approach.

In conclusion, the EU supports the long overdue enlargement of the CD. It is a matter of urgency and should be the subject of substantive consultations, laying out concrete scenarios for the consideration of CD members. One of the ways forward would be to appoint a special coordinator on this issue, which the EU fully supports. The non-participation of observers in the Conference last year was an insult to multilateralism and the principle of inclusivity. We call on all CD Member States to allow interested UN Member States to participate in the work of the Conference and to avoid political obstructions and the blocking of observer status of any UN Member States for political reasons.

Finally, gender equality and the full empowerment of all women and girls are vital cross-cutting priorities for the EU. We welcome efforts to promote gender equality and improve women’s full, active, equal, and meaningful participation, including in leadership positions in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control fora. The EU will engage further to transform gendered power dynamics in peace and security as suggested by the UN Secretary-General in action 5 of his recommendations under the “New Agenda for Peace”.

I thank you, Mr. President.