

PRESS RELEASE

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the situation in Slovakia**

The European Union recalls its strong support for Slovakia's European vocation, which the Union has demonstrated through its continuous support for all steps taken by the Slovak side to prepare for EU membership and fulfil the Copenhagen criteria.

The European Union's position was set out most recently in the note delivered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Presidency during the Presidency representative's visit to Bratislava on 4 March.

The EU wishes to express its concern at the recent order by Prime Minister Meciar to stop any criminal proceedings for crimes connected with the preparation and conduct of the referendum of 23/24 May 1997, and with the abduction of Michael Kovac Jr.

The decision by Prime Minister Meciar to exercise the presidential powers to grant amnesties in these cases brings into question his commitment to commonly accepted principles of good governance and the rule of law. These actions do not make a positive contribution to Slovakia's efforts to prepare for EU membership.

The EU recalls its previous concern at the circumstances surrounding the said referendum and the abduction of Michael Kovac Jr. Both issues were factors in the Commission's assessment that Slovakia did not meet the Copenhagen criteria.

The EU regrets that such steps might represent a set-back to the legitimate aspirations of the Slovak people to international respect and progressive integration into European structures. It will continue to support these aspirations and to follow developments related to their fulfilment closely.