

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENCY ON BEHALF OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION ON CHECHNYA**

1. The European Union strongly supports the demarche of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office made yesterday in Moscow, urging the Russian Government to declare an immediate cease-fire in order to allow the evacuation of the civilian population in Grozny. The European Union reiterates its position that a branch office of the OSCE Assistance Group in Chechnya be set up forthwith in Nazran, Ingushetia, to assist the humanitarian relief efforts and to allow for the safe delivery of international humanitarian aid for the victims of the war in Chechnya. There should be no forced repatriation of internally displaced people.
2. We urge the Russian Government to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law and as a member of the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, in the spirit of the strategic partnership between the EU and Russia. It is the consistent view of the European Union that there can be no military solution to a basically political problem. The OSCE Summit in Istanbul agreed that a political solution is essential and that the assistance of the OSCE would contribute to achieving this goal. The Summit welcomed the willingness of the OSCE to assist in the renewal of a political dialogue.
3. The EU is deeply concerned about the threat the conflict poses to the stability of the whole Caucasus region. It therefore commends the timely decision of the OSCE Permanent Council to send international monitors to the Russian-Georgian border. As stressed by the European Council in Helsinki, the territorial integrity of Georgia should not be compromised by spill-over from the fighting in Chechnya.

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