

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 1 April 1995 (03.04)

6127/95 (Presse 106)
P 032/95

**DECLARATION ON CHECHNYA MADE BY THE PRESIDENCY
ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union continues to follow developments in Chechnya with concern. It is dismayed to see that there has been a fresh upsurge in the fighting and deplores the loss of human life, the damage to property and the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law which are still occurring, according to the findings of the 3rd OSCE mission, which visited the area affected by the fighting from 20 to 27 March.

The European Union renews the calls it has already made in previous declarations and démarches for the fighting to stop and for negotiations to start on a political solution to the conflict, so that humanitarian aid can be conveyed to the people in need without hindrance.

The European Union considers that more substantial and more rapid progress is still needed.

The European Union calls on the Russian authorities to discharge with all speed the commitments they entered into at the beginning of March, when they agreed in principle that the OSCE should have a permanent presence on the ground and that that organization should play a role in the process of reaching a political settlement.

It welcomes the consensus decision taken by the Permanent Council on 29 March, calling for the OSCE's permanent "assistance group" to be deployed in mid-April. It wants agreement on the tasks and practical procedures of the group's permanent presence to be reached as soon as possible.

The European Union attaches importance to its relations with Russia, which it intends to develop in a spirit of cooperation and partnership; it is thus concerned at the possible consequences of the Chechen crisis on political relations in Europe. It points out that its relations with Russia must be based on the shared principles of the United Nations and the OSCE, as confirmed in the partnership agreement.

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