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**DECLARATION BY THE PRESIDENCY ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
CONCERNING NIGER**

The EU was concerned at the arrest of opposition political leaders and of certain participants in the demonstrations which took place on 11 January 1997 and welcomed their release on 23 January 1997.

Nevertheless, it remains concerned that the accusations against the opposition leaders have not yet been withdrawn and by the reactivation of the "State security court".

The EU calls on the Government of Niger to moderate its attitude to the opposition and to respect fully fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion and freedom of the press, and the rule of law. In this context, it notes with satisfaction the message addressed to the nation on 23 January by the President of the Republic.

It expresses the hope that all the political forces in Niger can engage in dialogue on a long-term basis with a view to national reconciliation, which is essential for the country's recovery.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated country Cyprus and the EFTA countries members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.