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Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union

on the FRY

The European Union wishes to convey a message to the authorities of the FRY and to the entire population of the country.

The message comes at a time when a new federal president is taking up his post and as important elections are about to be held in Serbia and Montenegro.

The European Union would like to draw attention to its declaration of 9 April 1996 on recognition by EU Member States of the FRY. At the time of the Council's decision, taken in Luxembourg on 29 April 1997, to grant autonomous trade preferences to the FRY for 1997, the European Union made its position clear. On that occasion, it published a declaration in which it expressed hope that the González report would be fully and quickly implemented.

The Yugoslav authorities have failed to take into consideration the package of recommendations made in that report, in particular, OSCE facilitation of dialogue between government and opposition, further adjustments to the draft media law and genuine reform of the electoral and judicial systems.

Moreover, several recent developments in politics in the FRY give rise to serious concern. Recent legislation in Serbia is leading the country away from true democratization and is jeopardizing opportunities for meaningful dialogue between the country's different political movements. The international community cannot remain indifferent to this development, which is particularly serious with regard to electoral laws and the media. Tension in Kosovo has recently been heightened by judgments which run counter to equitable legal standards. One disturbing factor is the apparent indifference of the FRY's authorities to the signs directed towards them.

It is now essential to stress the risks inherent in a policy which is leading to a worsening of the political climate, a deterioration in the economic situation and heightened ethnic tension in Kosovo and the Sandžak.

The FRY faces a clear choice between the road of democracy leading to economic recovery and its integration into the international community and the road of confrontation with all its negative economic and social effects on the people of the FRY.

The European Union requests all political authorities of the FRY, and particularly the new federal president, Mr Slobodan Milosevic, to demonstrate clearly willingness to take up the political and economic challenges of the moment and to assume the responsibility that this implies.

Holding free democratic elections under genuine OSCE observation may be regarded as a step in that direction.

The European Union urges the Yugoslav authorities to keep to their commitments, to accept OSCE (ODIHR) observation of the elections, including during the election campaign, and to guarantee freedom of expression and of information.

In view of the foregoing, the European Union exhorts all opposition political groupings to engage themselves fully during the period of the electoral campaign and to assume their political responsibilities.

Only functioning democratic institutions will be capable of healing the FRY's internal divisions and securing stability in the country and the region as a whole.

The European Union places great emphasis on the central importance of respect for human rights and the rights of minorities. It stresses the importance of negotiation and calls for avoidance of the use of violence and recourse to force, especially in Kosovo.

The European Union adjures all the political forces of the FRY to move clearly towards true integration of the FRY into the international community.

The FRY must rebuild its economic activity. The international community is ready to contribute to that process, but expects the FRY to cooperate to create the conditions necessary for it to take place.

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Rumania, Slovenia and the Czech Republic align themselves with this declaration.