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

The European Union reiterates its firm belief that negotiations are the only means of reaching a lasting political settlement to the situation in Chechnya, based on the respect of all concerned for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It urges all parties to pursue the path of dialogue. It welcomes reports that negotiations have been resumed.

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the situation in Chechnya and particularly the desperate plight of the civilian population. It deplores the rising number of attacks on civilians in the last week. It calls urgently on both sides to ensure that the civilian population can return to their homes and remain there in safety.

The European Union strongly urges both sides to desist from any further military action.

The European Union believes that the OSCE Assistance Group can play a useful role in assisting the parties with dialogue aimed at a political solution.