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**Statement by the European Union**  
**on freedom of the Press in the FRY**

In the light of the recent sentences against independent newspapers, the European Union would like to reiterate its deep concern over the arbitrary and discriminatory use of the Public Information Act as one of the numerous measures to restrict the freedom of the press and other mass media in Serbia. The fact that the Public Information Act provides for disproportionately high fines on journalists, editors-in-chief and publishers deemed to have abused the freedom of public information is particularly worrying. Also the stipulation by the Act that fines have to be paid within 24 hours is unreasonable, as it gives no time for proper defence proceedings and in practice has led to the close down of several independent media and media related institutions.

The European Union believes that freedom of expression is one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. Any restriction on the freedom of the press and other mass media is therefore detrimental to the democratisation of the FRY. The European Union demands once again that the Public Information Act is urgently repealed or significantly amended and that the freedom of expression as well as the freedom of the press and other mass media are respected in Serbia. In this context the European Union expresses its readiness to lend its assistance in cooperation with other international organisations such as OSCE and the Council of Europe to the Serbian authorities to draft a new democratically oriented law according to internationally recognised principles, such as the Helsinki Final Act and the provisions of the Council of Europe. Restrictive measures against media institutions will hamper the reintegration of the FRY in the international community.