

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the situation of the media in the Russian Federation**

Freedom of speech and pluralism in the media are essential democratic principles and core values for the EU-Russia partnership. They are among the most important gains the Russian people have achieved over the past ten years. The European Union is therefore deeply worried by recent developments in Russia.

The EU Presidency has recently expressed concern over the circumstances in connection with the takeover of Russia's largest independent television channel with national coverage, NTV, by Gazprom – a company in which the Russian Government is the main shareholder. The continued actions taken against NTV and other media in the wake of this takeover have fuelled these concerns both inside and outside Russia, damaging Russia's democratic credentials.

Without wishing to interfere in legal procedures in the Russian Federation, the European Union sees a need to draw the attention to the political effects of the related actions on the environment of the media, which must remain independent and free of state interference. These actions could in fact be interpreted as an encouragement to take action all over the Russian Federation to limit the freedom of the media, not least at regional and local level.

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In order to counteract such an impression, the European Union would strongly suggest that Russia's political leadership reassures Russian society as well as foreign partners that it fully supports the continued existence and development of pluralistic and independent media, being a cornerstone of the Russian democracy. The European Union further calls upon Russia's political leadership to provide its clear assurances that pluralism in the Russian media is a political priority and that it will actively work to promote this policy as well as to safeguard the independence of media outlets on the federal, regional and local level. There can be no democratic and modern state without a strong civil society and free media, where every citizen has unimpeded access to information through independent media reporting.
