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DECLARATION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION ON CHECHNYA

The European Union recalls its declaration of 17 January and continues to follow developments in Chechnya with great concern. It deplores the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law which are still occurring there. It calls for an immediate cessation of the fighting and for the opening of negotiations to allow a political solution to the conflict to be found. It demands that freedom of access to Chechnya and the proper conveying of humanitarian aid to the population be guaranteed.

The European Union places its action in the framework of the implementation of the principles and provisions of the OSCE, in compliance with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia.

In this context the European Union notes the agreement given by the Russian Federation to the sending of an OSCE delegation, to include a representative of the European Union Presidency, to the region affected by the crisis. The European Union hopes that this delegation will be given all the appropriate means of carrying out its mission, including the possibility of moving within Chechnya, and that it will be able to go there as soon as possible to help the OSCE find a solution to the crisis. This mission should concentrate its efforts particularly on questions involving human rights, the restoration of constitutional order and preparations, as soon as possible, for free and fair elections in Chechnya.

The European Union will decide on further stages in its action in the light of the outcome of this mission.

It accordingly reiterates its readiness to make use of the arrangements available under the OSCE human dimension mechanism, as well as the relevant articles of the code of conduct adopted at the Budapest Summit.

The European Union, which attaches importance to its relations with Russia and to the continuation of the democratic reform process in that country, is concerned at the possible consequences of the crisis. It would point out that these relations must be based on the shared principles of the United Nations and the OSCE, as confirmed in the Partnership Agreement.

The European Union will remain vigilant and reserves the right to consider other options.