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**DECLARATION BY THE PRESIDENCY ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
ON GEORGIA/ABKHAZIA**

The European Union deplores the recent violence in the Gali region of Abkhazia, Georgia which has resulted in substantial loss of life, particularly among the civilian population, and has forced large numbers of Georgian refugees from their homes.

The European Union welcomes the signing, on 25 May 1998, of a cease-fire Protocol and calls on all parties to adhere strictly to it and to the Moscow Agreement of 14 May on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces. It commends the determination of President Shevardnadze to exercise restraint and to do everything possible to ensure that the crisis does not lead to a further escalation. The European Union is convinced that the conflict in Abkhazia can only be resolved through peaceful negotiation with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

The European Union shares the concern expressed in the statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council on 28 May at the recent slowing of the peace process. It too calls on the parties to display the necessary political will to ensure substantial results on key issues within the framework of the United Nations-led peace process.

The European Union is particularly concerned at the plight of the refugees and displaced persons. It calls on both parties to fulfil their obligations in respect of the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes in secure conditions.

The Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus associated with the European Union and the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.

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