

PRESS RELEASE

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the crisis in Chechnya**

Deeply distressed by the events in Pervomaiskoe, the European Union deplors the loss of human life caused and calls for an immediate halt to the fighting in order to avoid further bloodshed.

The European Union condemns hostage-taking in very firm terms, whether it be the bloody events in Pervomaiskoe or the hijacking of the Turkish vessel "Avrasya" in the Black Sea.

The events in Pervomaiskoe show that the crisis in Chechnya cannot be resolved by force, but only by a return to political dialogue between the parties.

Further to the declaration it issued last June on the hostage-taking in Budennovsk, the European Union emphasizes once again the need to seek a political settlement and points out that the OSCE Assistance Group could make a useful contribution to a process of negotiated settlement of the conflict, on the basis of the OSCE's principles and democratic values. The European Union very much hopes that the Assistance Group, as well as the humanitarian organizations present on the ground, which have the Union's full support, can continue their tasks unimpeded, with their safety ensured.

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