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*Présidence luxembourgeoise  
du Conseil de l'Union européenne*

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### **EU STATEMENT ON TAJIKISTAN**

The European Union highly values its co-operation with Tajikistan in the OSCE. Tajikistan has shown that it can play a pioneering role in the region, e.g. last year in promoting mine action. We are looking forward to furthering our cooperation in all three dimensions.

We appreciate progress achieved in Tajikistan over the past years and note its impact on the whole region. The introduction of a moratorium on the death penalty in 2004 marked an important advance in the promotion of human rights.

The EU believes that the upcoming elections provide an opportunity for Tajikistan to demonstrate its democratic credentials. The OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Report dated 4<sup>th</sup> January acknowledges that the Tajik government introduced a number of positive steps in preparing for the elections. We hope that Tajikistan will continue along this path. The EU has taken careful note of the ODIHR interim report issued on Wednesday and trusts that Tajikistan will continue cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR to achieve further improvements and address deficiencies. Many EU Member States have already stated their intention to send long and short-term observers.

The EU has, however, noted with concern backward steps in the democratic process in Tajikistan, including obstacles being placed in the way of some non-governmental parties and NGOs. In November 2004, Tajik authorities banned the Ruzi Nav newspaper. In January, Tajik authorities seized the circulation of the last issue of the newspaper Nerui Sukhan. There can be no free and fair elections without free media. The EU is looking forward to a response by the Tajik Government to the concerns raised by the Representative on Freedom of the Media. The EU encourages the Tajik Authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure the freedom of the media and to grant better access for non-governmental political parties to the media, including to state owned TV programs.

The EU stands ready to continue cooperation with Tajikistan in its efforts to achieve further progress.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia<sup>1</sup> align themselves with this statement.

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<sup>1</sup>Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process