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### **EU STATEMENT ON AZERBAIJAN**

The European Union welcomes President Ilham Aliyev's decree on improving the practice of elections in Azerbaijan and shares the OSCE Office's view that this timely measure, aiming at preventing possible violations of the electoral law by the executive authorities is a very important step.

The European Union, therefore, looks forward to the full and consistent implementation of the decree by the Azerbaijani authorities and considers it as a first step in the process leading to the parliamentary elections in November 2005. The EU expects further improvements of the election framework in line with the recommendations outlined in previous OSCE/ODIHR reports. The EU underlines the importance of the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections for the democratic development and stability of Azerbaijan. The EU is ready to help ensure that the electoral process is well organised.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania and the Candidate Countries 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