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Permanent Representation of
the Netherlands to the OSCE
Opernring 5
A-1010 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 58939 241
Fax: +43 1 58939 266

www.eu2004.nl

The Netherlands Presidency of the European Union

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EU Statement

**in response to the address by the Representative on Freedom of the Media,
Mr. Miklós Haraszti**

The European Union is pleased to welcome the Representative on Freedom of the Media to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his second quarterly report, which deals with a range of important issues and individual cases of concern. The Representative on Freedom of the Media plays a vital role in promoting full implementation of the OSCE *acquis*. Monitoring of developments relating to media freedom remains a key component of his mandate. We welcome the geographical impartiality which continues to be evident in the work of the Representative. Those member States of the European Union in which he has expressed an interest will afford all possible cooperation to his office.

The EU also attaches high importance to the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media on specific matters related to freedom of expression and free, independent and pluralistic media. In this context we welcome the emphasis placed by the Representative on the subject of libel laws, an issue which has to go beyond the question of legal regulations. The report of the Representative on Freedom of the Media on five countries reflects significant progress achievable in this area. The overall problem of "structural censorship" remains a threat to freedom of the media in the OSCE region. We support the Representative in his cooperation with authorities in participating States and his efforts in bringing concerns to the attention of the governments concerned.

The EU followed the proceedings of the 2004 Amsterdam Internet Conference in August closely. The EU looks forward to the publication of the "Media Freedom Internet Cookbook" later this year. The EU welcomes the emphasis put by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on the promotion of Internet literacy as an effective tool to promote tolerance in our societies, which is very much in line with the recommendations made during the Paris meeting of the OSCE on the Relationship between racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes on June 16-17. The EU therefore encourages the Office to pursue on-going efforts to enhance the co-operation with other relevant bodies of the OSCE, in particular with the ODIHR. We are confident that the activities of the Representative will contribute to furthering common values and principles in countering hate speech.

The EU welcomes the fact that a temporary Special Representative, Mr. Dardan Gashi, is to be dispatched to Kosovo to observe and encourage implementation of the recommendations presented to the Permanent Council in April. We wish Mr. Gashi well in his new appointment.

The European Union fully shares the concern of the Representative at worrying trends in media freedom in Belarus. Our concerns about the situation in that country were made known in a statement to the Permanent Council on 9 September in which we stated that freedom of the media and access to the independent information sources in Belarus has been seriously undermined by the activities of the Belarusian Government. The EU reiterates its call to Belarus to reverse its policy of strangling independent media and to live up to its OSCE commitments on freedom of the media, including through full cooperation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and by granting him access to Belarus.

The EU welcomes the attention paid by the Representative to the cases of Italian and French journalists in Iraq. We share his concern about the treatment of Mr. Aydin Quliyev and Mr. Enulla Fatullayev in Azerbaijan and urge the Azerbaijani authorities to provide full information about these incidents.

The EU has noted with interest the prompt report by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on media problems which arose during and after the recent horrifying terrorist attack in Beslan. With regard to working conditions for the media in general, the EU has on previous occasions expressed its concern at the problems faced by some of its journalists in obtaining visas and accreditation to work in Russia. While recognising that impediments in this regard manifest themselves in many different parts of the OSCE, the EU wishes to reiterate this concern. We would appreciate any additional effort that could be taken by the Representative in trying to ensure that journalists enjoy unimpeded freedom of movement in carrying out their professional tasks.

Finally, on Moldova the EU welcomes the prospect of a visit to that country by the Representative in October.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the stabilisation and Association Process