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**STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT
THE 719th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 July 2008

**In response to Mr. Sergey Lebedev,
Chairman of the Executive Committee and Executive Secretary of the
Commonwealth of Independent States**

The European Union (EU) wishes to welcome Mr. Lebedev, the Chairman of the Executive Committee and Executive Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The countries of the CIS and the European Union share a common responsibility for peace and security on our continent. The protection of the democratic values on which the OSCE has based its unique model of co-operation must remain at the centre of our priorities if we are to continue together to make progress towards the establishment of a space of peace, freedom and democratic governance extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok, if we are to take up the security challenges facing us, and if we are to strengthen multilateralism as a barrier to a return to a bloc-based logic.

Settlement of frozen conflicts represents one of our primary challenges. The European Union intends to pursue its commitment to a Transdniestrian settlement within the agreed framework of the 5+2 negotiations and on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. With regard to South Ossetia, while recalling the Joint Action adopted by the Council of the European Union on 16 June 2008, our task should be to revive the settlement process and ensure the necessary conditions for the implementation of the economic rehabilitation programme, to which the EU is the main contributor. In Abkhazia the European Union remains determined to pursue its commitment with the support of and in collaboration with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We welcome the peace initiative with regard to Abkhazia proclaimed by the Georgian President, along with the direct talks being held by the parties, and it is our hope that they will make it possible to engage in a constructive dialogue on this question. Lastly, the EU reiterates its support for the efforts being made by the Co-Chairman of the Minsk Group and welcomes the commitment reiterated by the parties in St. Petersburg to continue negotiations on the basis of the Madrid document.

The fight to ensure respect for fundamental rights and freedoms also calls for decisive commitment. The European Union notes with concern that in certain parts of the OSCE area attacks on human rights and democratic freedoms persist or are even growing worse, running counter to the international obligations and commitments undertaken by the States concerned.

In particular, the situation with regard defenders of human rights must be given our careful attention.

In your report you mentioned the subject of election observation. For the European Union, the two elements that represent the OSCE's strength in this area must be preserved: the autonomy that the participating States have conferred on the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), because the institution entrusted with the task of monitoring elections should not be both judge and an involved party; the methods developed by the ODIHR, which because of their rigour and professionalism guarantee objectivity and credibility. The next seminar held by the Chairmanship on election issues will provide an opportunity to engage in dialogue on this important issue.

The OSCE also represents a place where the Member States of the European Union and those of the CIS must pool their efforts to deal with new challenges to security such as terrorism, organized crime or environmental threats. In particular, we regard Central Asia as a region where the OSCE and the CIS could strengthen their co-operation.

Thank you for your attention.

The candidate countries, Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.