



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
regarding the recent arrests in Syria**

Recalling the Presidency's statement of 19th January, the European Union expresses regret that the positive steps taken in January 2006 regarding the human rights situation in Syria have not been continued. On the contrary, the situation has substantially deteriorated. The EU expresses its deep concern about the recent widespread harassment of human rights defenders, their families and peaceful political activists, in particular arbitrary arrests and repeated incommunicado detention. The European Union calls on the Syrian government to fully respect freedom of expression and assembly as laid down in the Syrian Constitution and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Syria in 1969, which should be fully in force in light of the recent limitation of the emergency law to matters strictly concerning state security.

The European Union urges the Syrian authorities to reconsider all cases of political prisoners and immediately release all prisoners of conscience.

P R E S S

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries, Turkey, Croatia * and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this declaration.

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