



EUROPEAN UNION



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**Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the
European Union on the situation of Human Rights Defenders
in the North Caucasus**

The European Union expresses its preoccupation at the continuing human rights violations in the North Caucasus and the worsening of the situation of human rights defenders in the region, as also noted in Dick Marty's (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) report on the human rights violations in the North Caucasus, one year after the assassination of Mrs Natalia Estemirova of the Non-Governmental Organisation Memorial. The European Union is concerned at the recent threats received by the NGO Memorial and the charges brought forward against its Director, Mr Oleg Orlov.

The European Union recalls the importance of protecting human rights defenders in Russia and worldwide, and allowing them to freely exercise their activities in accordance with the Declaration of the United Nations General Assembly on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998.

The European Union strongly encourages the authorities of the Russian Federation to work towards putting an end to the climate of impunity and fear in the North Caucasus in general and Chechnya in particular, and hopes for swift results in the investigation into the death of Ms Estemirova - as was declared by President Medvedev after the murder - and other Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation.

P R E S S

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* and Iceland⁺, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

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

⁺ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.