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**Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on
behalf of the EU on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day,
3 May 2011**

"Freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental right of every human being and an inherent part of human dignity. It is also a cornerstone of democracy and crucial for the free flow of information to which everyone is entitled. On the occasion of World Press Freedom day, the European Union recalls these basic principles, enshrined in international law, and the vital role played by independent and free press and media. The EU pays particular tribute to the invaluable work of the many journalists and media professionals around the world who with dedication and courage contribute to revealing the truth about unfolding events.

As the recent events in countries neighbouring the EU illustrate, it is thanks not only to the professional commitment of journalists and other media professionals, but also to the many private bloggers, that the world learns about the situation on the ground and people's aspirations for freedom and social justice. However, many journalists, particularly in conflict zones, face constant danger in communicating first hand information, sometimes at risk to their own lives. In many cases, they are targeted by those who dislike the nature of the information they reveal, suffering arrest or kidnapping, torture or killing. The EU calls upon all governments to abide by international norms for the protection of freedom of the press and media and to release without delay all journalists or bloggers unlawfully detained.

Censorship and harassment of journalists are unacceptable. Regrettably, there are still too many countries where access to information and journalistic freedom are restricted. The internet and social media have become an important way of promoting freedom of expression; they provide unprecedented access to information and a way of communicating with the largest possible audience. That is why the EU is firmly opposed to any unjustified restrictions on the internet and other new media.

P R E S S

The EU calls on all States to proactively promote freedom of opinion and expression as well as media pluralism and independence."

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

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.
