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EU STATEMENT ON UKRAINE

The European Union has taken note of the OSCE/ODIHR final report on the presidential elections held in Ukraine on 31 October, 21 November and 26 December 2004 which was issued on 11 May. While the report states that the first and second rounds on 31 October and 21 November respectively failed to meet a considerable number of OSCE commitments, Council of Europe and other international standards for democratic elections, it concludes that the 26 December repeat second round vote brought Ukraine substantially closer to meeting them. We were particularly encouraged by the significant improvements regarding media coverage and the conduct of the campaign as well as the role played by the Supreme Court, the Central Election Commission and civil society.

The European Union has already welcomed this positive development as an expression of Ukraine's commitment to democratic values. The EU would like to recall that ensuring the democratic conduct of elections in Ukraine in accordance with OSCE commitments and other international standards is a priority in the EU-Ukraine Action Plan.

In view of the parliamentary elections scheduled for the first half of 2006, a number of remaining shortcomings and weaknesses highlighted in the OSCE/ODIHR final report should be swiftly addressed, in particular those relating to election administration and voter registration as well as to the legislative framework, including provision for domestic non-partisan election observers.

The EU welcomes the recent visit by Ambassador Strohal and his team to Kiev as part of an ongoing process by both the OSCE/ODIHR and the Ukrainian authorities to follow-up on the report's relevant recommendations. We trust that the Ukrainian authorities will use the coming months to take all necessary legal and administrative steps in order to implement the recommendations and ensure that the parliamentary elections are conducted in full compliance with OSCE commitments, Council of Europe and other international standards for democratic elections.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania and the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement.

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