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**United Kingdom
Delegation**

To the Organisation for Security and
Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Vienna

Jaurèsgasse 12
1030 Vienna

Telephone: 71613-3304
Facsimile: 71613-3900

United Kingdom Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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EU Statement on South Ossetia, Georgia

At the OSCE Ministerial Council in Ljubljana, on 6 December 2005, all participating States welcomed the steps taken by the Georgian side to address peaceful resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia. The participating States expressed the belief that the recent proposals, in particular the Peace Plan built upon the initiatives of President Saakashvili presented at the 59th United Nations General Assembly, will serve as a basis for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Subsequently, the South Ossetian side has put forward proposals on next steps for peaceful conflict resolution.

These developments open up the welcome possibility of serious, early, joint negotiations on the peaceful resolution process, based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Early and complete demilitarisation of the zone of conflict, also called for in Ljubljana, remains crucial to the peace process, as was agreed by both sides. This is reflected in agreements on demilitarisation in the Joint Control Commission in the past as well as in the current proposals for conflict resolution.

It is therefore regrettable that two incidents occurred in the zone of conflict, described in the Spot Report of the OSCE Mission to Georgia of 15 December 2005, in which OSCE Mission Monitoring Officers were stopped and hindered in their work. In one of the incidents the patrol was threatened by armed men (with no visible badges) and civilians. These incidents once again show that the presence of unauthorized, armed formations poses a serious threat to the security situation in the zone of conflict.

Furthermore, the European Union underlines that the OSCE Mission to Georgia should at all times be enabled to conduct independent, unrestricted and unhindered monitoring in line with the Mission's freedom of movement throughout the zone of conflict and the area of responsibility of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces, as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding with the South Ossetian authorities.

We note with satisfaction the progress reported on the Needs Assessment Study by the Steering Committee held on December 16-17 and look forward to further developments in view of the economic rehabilitation. The European Union also encourages joint policing activities in the zone of conflict.

As always, the European Union continues to support peaceful resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia ¹ 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, 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.

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