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EU MUST ENSURE RUSSIA LIVES UP TO ITS COMMITMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Ahead of tomorrow's start of formal negotiations on a strategic partnership between Russia and the EU, the European Green Party has reiterated its call for the EU and its member states to take a strong and united stand in defence of human and democratic rights in Russia.

EGP Co-Spokesperson Philippe Lamberts said: "We European Greens have constantly argued that the European Union should not push ahead with its pursuit of a "strategic partnership" with Russia until Russia proves that it shares the demand of Russian media, opposition, minorities and NGOs, which the EU supports, for democratic standards to be upheld and is therefore a worthy partner. Unfortunately, the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev so far demonstrates a continuation of the Putin Era and although there have been some positive comments about the importance of the rule of law, these have been contradicted by aggressive behaviour towards Georgia, continuing human rights abuses in Chechnya and increasingly frequent attacks on ethnic, racial and religious minorities in Russia. All of these issues, as well as continuing restrictions on the freedom of independent media and political opponents, mean that the EU has a responsibility to defend democratic principles and not sacrifice them because of short-term economic interests. The EU must use its economic leverage and Russia's desire for a closer relationship to persuade Russia to live up to the binding commitments that it has already in theory accepted, for example, under instruments like the European Court of European Rights. "
