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BRUSSELS, 20 April 2006 - The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, expressed his condolences to the family of a French expert who was killed when a landmine exploded in Tajikistan on 19 April. Warrant Officer Gilles Sarrazin worked for the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (Fondation Suisse de Déminage, FSD), which is one of the OSCE's implementing partners in its mine clearance activities in Tajikistan. He suffered severe injuries when an anti-personnel mine exploded during his clearance work in a minefield on the Tajik-Afghan border. He died of his injuries at a hospital in the southern city of Pyanj. Azam Asrorov, a Tajik soldier who worked with Mr Sarrazin, was also seriously wounded in the blast. He is recovering in a hospital in the capital city of Dushanbe. "I extend my most sincere condolences to the family of Mr Sarrazin and to his organization, the FSD," Minister De Gucht said. "At the same time, I hope that his colleague from Tajikistan will recover soon from the injuries sustained in this tragic accident." The Chairman-in-Office also expressed his support for the joint OSCE/FSD mine action programme. "This programme is vital for the security of Tajikistan's population," he said. "Despite this terrible accident, I strongly support continuing the initiative. I greatly appreciate the work and dedication of the people working for the project, who risk their lives to save those of others." The joint mine action programme by the OSCE and the FSD is funded by Canada, Japan, the canton of Geneva, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Kingdom, the Karl Popper Foundation and Foundation SI Geneva. Between 1992 and 2005, 225 citizens of Tajikistan were killed by landmines and over 200 were injured.

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