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EU 'sanctions' on Mugabe's inner circle to be relaxed

22nd March 2013 -- Following what southern African observers have described as a 'peaceful and credible' referendum on Zimbabwe's Constitution, there are now moves to lift the EU 'restrictive measures' on most of the Mugabe supporters that had previously been banned from Europe and had their assets frozen. Only 10 individuals (from the 91 previously banned) and two companies will remain on the list.

Geoffrey Van Orden MEP, Chairman of the European Parliament 'Friends of Zimbabwe' group, who has long spearheaded the Parliament's campaign for freedom and democratic change in Zimbabwe, commented:

"We recognise that there has been some movement in the right direction and this needs to be reinforced. The referendum was just a first step. The really important event will be the elections later in the year.

"Our concern now is that all the processes connected with the elections should be carried out fairly and correctly and that campaigning is free from violence and intimidation.

"A reduction in the restrictive measures is just about acceptable provided they can be quickly reimposed if there is any sign of violence, intimidation or manipulation of the electoral process. My understanding is that this is exactly what has been agreed.

"The changes meet the wishes of other African countries and will signal to ZANU-PF insiders and to army and police chiefs that they have nothing to fear from real democratic change.

"The ball is now in Mugabe's court."

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Geoffrey Van Orden MBE MEP is Conservative Defence and Security Spokesman. Over many years he has initiated the European Parliament's tough resolutions on Zimbabwe. He has been personally banned by Mugabe from entering Zimbabwe.

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Note to Editors: The new Constitution will introduce certain changes: the President will be limited to two five year terms (starting now – Mugabe can therefore have two more tries); more devolution to ten municipal authorities; a bill of rights to protect freedom of expression; an end to the President's power to veto legislation; and the seizure of farms under the land reform programme has been given constitutional cover.