



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement in reply to the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, H.E. Ambassador György Szabó

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Szabó back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

We support the Project Co-ordinator's close dialogue with the host government and other relevant stakeholders on project activities across all three dimensions, designed to assist Uzbekistan in meeting its OSCE commitments and pursuing its reform and democratisation agenda. We attach great importance to the Project Co-ordinator's efforts to encourage and facilitate participation of representatives of Uzbekistan in OSCE events and regional and international trainings. We commend its active contribution to the enhancement of co-operation between Uzbekistan and various OSCE Institutions and executive structures.

The European Union closely followed the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan held in December 2014, as well as the presidential elections held in March 2015. With regard to the presidential elections, we took note of the preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, including on significant aspects of the electoral process that were not in line with legal provisions on elections or with Uzbekistan's OSCE commitments and other international obligations. We encourage the authorities of Uzbekistan to effectively address the restrictions and irregularities mentioned in the OSCE/ODIHR preliminary statement, in particular as regards the fundamental freedoms of association and expression. We stand ready to assist Uzbekistan in its efforts to bring its election process in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections.

We welcome that the Project Co-ordinator has continued its longstanding assistance to Uzbekistan in addressing transnational threats and challenges, including the fight against terrorism, cyber-crime and cyber security and illegal drug trafficking. We

particularly value the co-operation with the Police Academy and strengthening its contacts with similar institutions in the OSCE area. We support the Project Co-ordinator's assistance to the development of a Draft National Action Plan on the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 against the proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. We underline the importance of regional co-operation and co-ordination with relevant international actors, also with regard to the security situation after the withdrawal of ISAF forces from neighbouring Afghanistan.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension, the EU particularly appreciates activities pertaining to good governance and the rule of law, such as projects on combating money laundering and financing of terrorism, as well as the fight against corruption. We also attach great importance to training activities in support of women's entrepreneurship.

With regard to cross-dimensional issues, we welcome the Project Co-ordinator's assistance to the authorities and civil society of Uzbekistan in combating trafficking in human beings, focusing on capacity building and prevention. Co-ordination of the efforts through the National Referral Mechanism, awareness raising and enhancement of the role of law enforcement agencies in protecting and rehabilitating victims remains crucial.

In the Human Dimension, we highly value the Project Co-ordinator's expert support to the follow-up work to the adoption of the National Action Plan on how to implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Treaty Bodies, specifically its assistance in bringing national legislation in line with the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We continue to support the Project Co-ordinator's focus on human rights education and practical training for the police and judiciary, assistance to the Ombudsperson Institution and to capacity building for civil society and the media.

We underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to ensuring the efficient use of resources and that their activities remain results oriented and add value. We encourage the Mission to focus on results and follow-up and to ensure that all activities and reporting are representative of a culture of evaluation and implementation of lessons learned. To that end, we would be grateful if Ambassador

Szabo could highlight some of the key impacts of the Mission's programmatic work during the reporting period

Mr Chairman, the European Union continues to be concerned about Uzbekistan's implementation of its OSCE human dimension commitments, notably those related to freedom of expression and freedom of the media and freedom of assembly and association. We consider work in these and other areas related to human rights and fundamental freedoms particularly relevant in Uzbekistan.

The EU stands ready to continue its co-operation with the Government of Uzbekistan in a comprehensive way. We reiterate the importance we attach to the EU – Uzbek dialogue in the various existing formats. In this regard, we welcome the last meeting of the EU – Uzbekistan Cooperation Council which was held in Brussels on May 18.

We take this opportunity to call on Uzbekistan to pay its contribution, and its arrears, to the OSCE's Unified Budget and to reconsider the issue of taxation of local staff salaries in the Project Co-ordinator's Office and reimbursement of the Centre's VAT expenditures, making more funds available for programmatic work.

In conclusion, the EU would like to thank Ambassador Szabó and his team for their dedicated work. As this is the last time Ambassador Szabó presents his report to the Permanent Council, we wish him all the best in the future.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.