



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1190
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**EU Statement on the Report by the Head of the OSCE
Programme Office in Astana, Amb. Szabó**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Szabó back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report. The European Union has been cooperating well with Kazakhstan based on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement for about two years now. We welcome Kazakhstan's ongoing active involvement in the EU-Central Asia High Level Political and Security Dialogue as part of the regional political dialogue.

The EU reaffirms the importance of the continued OSCE presence in Kazakhstan. We support the Programme Office's intention to continue co-operation with the host country across all three dimensions in line with OSCE principles and commitments, OSCE Chairmanship priorities, and the host country's strategic vision. We acknowledge Kazakhstan's long-term reform agenda. We encourage the authorities to further enhance their cooperation with the OSCE to the full potential, and vice-versa, encourage the Programme Office to make full use of its mandate.

We welcome that the Programme Office has continued its longstanding cooperation including with civil society, media, academia, and business community in its activities as well as with international organizations and national stakeholders. In general, we welcome the continued activities related to freedom of expression and of the media, freedom of religion or belief, and non-discrimination, managing public assemblies, as well as to democratic policing. We value the good cooperation of the Programme Office with other field operations in Central Asia and the Office's active support of the Central Asian Youth Network.

In the Human Dimension, we commend the Programme Office for having continued the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and the

strengthening of democratic institutions. Still, we remain concerned about severe restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as attempts by the authorities to control civil society. We express concern regarding the temporary detention of journalists and editors from Ratel.kz and Forbes Kazakhstan, and the blocking of the Ratel.kz webpage (March 2018). We encourage Kazakhstan to make use of the OSCE's expertise, including that of ODIHR and the RFoM, and to follow-up on the recommendations provided by the RFoM after the 19th Central Asia Media Conference (Oct. 2017).

We welcome the organization of events by the Programme Office on topical questions such as “legal protection against hate speech” and would be interested in hearing more about how this fits within the frame of OSCE commitments and international standards. We also would be interested to hear about a possible continuation of support to the management of public assemblies, and about the follow-up to the recommendations provided. We highly value activities on criminal justice, judicial, penitentiary and judiciary reform. We appreciate the work to ensure the right to effective legal aid, the independence of legal professions, promotion of judicial independence and the right to a fair trial. We would be interested in hearing more about the conclusions of the 2017 events on the development of legal professions.

Furthermore, we welcome the Office's focus on the implementation of a “zero tolerance” policy towards torture by strengthening the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), enhancing its capacities and developing a legislative framework. We value the Office's work on combating domestic violence and promoting gender equality, including the elaboration of a new National Strategy for Gender Equality for 2017-2027. We also appreciate the development of the first internal Programme Office in Astana Gender Action Plan.

We also appreciate the close work with Central Election Commission to address the modernization of the voting processes and underline that the Office should further rely on the support of ODIHR. We welcome that the Senior management will enhance the adherence to the Common Regulatory Management System (CRMS) and would be interested in receiving information on its implementation.

In the Politico-military Dimension, we welcome that capacity building in border security issues, including in a regional context, remains a priority and appreciate the Office's continued cooperation with the EU Border Management in Central Asia Programme (BOMCA), its support for confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM) as well as for regional training seminars on the practical implementation of the Vienna Document. We positively assess its ongoing activities aimed at preventing and countering VERLT, and combatting transnational organized crime while promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. We commend the Office's support and co-organization of simulation exercises on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

In the second Dimension, we welcome the Programme Office's continued work on promoting good governance, with a view to combating corruption, money laundering, as well as terrorism financing and enhancing financial institutions regulation. We commend the support relating to developing efficient labour migration management and to the adoption of the 2017-2021 Migration Policy Concept Paper. We furthermore welcome the Office's assistance to the Government's reform for the transition to a green economy, including environmental education and the Office's advocacy for water management in a transboundary context. We commend continued advocating for energy security, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and further work on regional economic connectivity.

We continue to underline that for all field operations, effective evaluation is essential in ensuring the efficient use of resources, and that activities remain result-oriented. We encourage field operations to focus reporting on results and follow-up. We would be grateful if Ambassador Szabó could highlight some of the key impacts of the Office's work during this reporting period, and inform on what is planned by way of evaluation for next year. Finally, we recall our position that local staff salaries should be exempt from income tax, and repeat our request that the Kazakh Government introduces legislation to this effect. In this regard, we recall the welcome development in this field by another government in the region.

In conclusion, we thank Ambassador Szabó for his report and wish him and his staff well for their work throughout the year.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential

Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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