



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1053 Vienna, 21 May 2015

EU statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, H.E. Ambassador Natalia Zarudna

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Zarudna back to the Permanent Council and thank her for her comprehensive report.

Kazakhstan is a pivotal country in a region that has become more and more important for the security in the OSCE area as a whole. The Programme Office has an important role in supporting the country in implementing its OSCE commitments. We support the Office's assistance to the host country's comprehensive reform goals across all three dimensions in line with OSCE principles and commitments.

The European Union closely followed the recent presidential elections in Kazakhstan, including the pre-electoral phase. As already stated in the Permanent Council on 30 April, we regret that earlier recommendations by ODIHR were not addressed and voters were not offered a genuine choice. We encourage the government of Kazakhstan to implement the ODIHR recommendations before the next legislative elections to address shortcomings and to ensure that they are in line with international standards. Kazakhstan is a key partner for the EU, and we stand ready to continue our support to the implementation of further reforms to strengthen democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Kazakhstan.

We note that during the reporting period Ambassador Zarudna and her staff had to face the double challenge of ensuring a smooth transition to the new mandate that came into force on 1 January this year while conditions of work became more difficult due to a general increase of costs and a high turnover of personnel. We thank her and her staff for all their hard work.

We recall the interpretative statement of the EU in conjunction to the PC Decision on the new mandate and note with satisfaction that the Programme Office and the former Centre have pursued programming activities across all three dimensions. We especially welcome the many regional activities and involvement of youth. We encourage the Programme Office to continue in this vein and also to further develop its efforts to engage civil society.

We welcome that the Programme Office and the former Centre have continued their longstanding cooperation with the host country and international partners on strengthening regional security and addressing transnational threats. Threats such as trafficking in human beings and drugs are on the rise, as well as the threat from Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism. Regional cooperation is important in this regard. We therefore welcome that capacity building in border security issues remained a priority. In this context, we commend the Programme Office for engaging young people and civil society in many activities that aim at countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism. The difficult economic situations in some countries of the region expose young people in particular to risks of radicalisation and only a participatory approach can lead to success.

We welcome the Programme Office's continued support for the Government of Kazakhstan's reform policy, especially programmatic activities that focus on promoting good governance, countering corruption, money laundering and terrorism financing, managing labour migration and advocating water and energy security in a transboundary context. We note that the Programme Office continued supporting activities on trade and transport facilitation, in view of Kazakhstan's forthcoming accession to the World Trade Organization. We encourage the Programme Office to cooperate with the WTO and identify where the Programme Office can add value to existing or future WTO activities. As a Central Asian country with large arid areas, Kazakhstan is especially prone to the negative effects of climate change. We therefore support a focus on climate change implications, disaster risk reduction and efficient water management, including its close cooperation with Aarhus Centres and civil society.

The Human Dimension programme continues to be our priority. We commend the Programme Office for having continued the multi-year efforts to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and the strengthening of democratic institutions; and to encourage the implementation of ratified international conventions, national policies and legislation in compliance with OSCE commitments. We continue to be concerned about restrictions regarding freedoms of expression and of the media, of peaceful assembly and association, religion or belief. We encourage Kazakhstan to make use of the OSCE's expertise and therefore value the Programme Office's continued work with the host authorities, civil society and media on issues related to freedom of expression and of media including safety of journalists.

We underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to promote efficiency and aid the development of best practice and lesson learning. We thank you for highlighting some of the key impacts made by the Centre in Astana through its programmatic work in this reporting period.

In conclusion, we thank Ambassador Zarudna and her staff again for their work throughout the year. As this is the last time Ambassador Zarudna will present her report to the Permanent Council we wish her 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.