



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1186
Vienna, 17 May 2018**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the
OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, Ambassador Tuula
Yrjölä**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Yrjölä to the Permanent Council and thank her for presenting her detailed and extremely useful report. We are grateful for the work that has gone into producing it.

The EU attaches great importance to the work of the OSCE Office in Dushanbe and we appreciate the valuable permanent cooperation between the OSCE Office and the EU Delegation to Tajikistan.

The EU has been strengthening its engagement and partnership with Central Asia and the region, not least to promote our common security interests. This enhanced engagement is also reflected in our work towards new partnership and cooperation agreements with countries in the region.

We note the changes in the Office since the adoption of the new mandate on 1 June 2017. In this regard, we strongly welcome the creation of the Programme Outreach Unit within the Office of the Head of Mission. Following the closure of the five field offices, we expect the work of this Unit to be unhindered on the ground across the whole of the country to the benefit of people in all regions.

We note the establishment of a bi-yearly Partnership Platform that replaces the previous annual Task Force meeting. We regard the collaborative, multi stakeholder process to set the Office's forward agenda on a strategic level, and review progress, as a model for the OSCE. We are therefore very keen to hear from you Ambassador how the new process will further improve an already effective planning process and strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

We were pleased to note that civil society stakeholders were included in the first Partnership Platform meeting last month. We regard this participation as essential for effective programme planning. The Office's access to and interaction with civil society should be unhindered, and co-operation with the OSCE Office and structures should have no detrimental consequences for those Civil Society organisations. We would welcome more detail on how civil society will remain an integral part of this process.

We welcome your report's focus on activity across all three dimensions and support the Office's efforts to ensure its work supports all OSCE dimensions. We note and welcome the Office's approach to mainstreaming of human rights and gender throughout its activities.

We welcome greater cooperation between the countries and OSCE offices in Central Asia. We hope that the positive example of shared training on border management and mine clearance can be replicated in other areas, for example on preventing and countering violent extremism.

We value the work of the Border Management Staff College (BMSC). It plays a key role in building capacity of the border-related agencies of Tajikistan, neighbouring countries and beyond. We therefore repeat our call for the BMSC to be funded from the Unified Budget, at least partially, to provide much-needed financial stability to enable the college to focus on its educational activities rather than on fundraising.

In the first dimension, we welcome the Office's work facilitating policy-oriented discussion fora between officials and civil society as well as the 'whole of society' approach to tackling VERLT. We also welcome the Office's work related to the respect for human rights and rule of law by law enforcement officers. We would like to ask what assessments have been made of the effectiveness of this work. We welcomed the visit and valuable participation of Minister of Internal Affairs Rakhimzoda to the Security Committee on 13 February to present on Tajik government support to the national police reform process. We would encourage similar visits of this kind to continue to increase dialogue.

We appreciate that Tajikistan's standing in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business index has improved by five positions. We note however that Tajikistan has fallen from

151st to 161st place in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. The EU within the framework of the OSCE and through its bilateral co-operation programmes stands ready to support the authorities of Tajikistan to further reinforce public trust in institutions. This can contribute to greater investment. We particularly welcome the Office's anti-corruption work in the second dimension. We hope the recent improvement in relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will bring security and economic benefits to people in both countries.

We highly value the Office's work in the third dimension. We welcome the focus on gender mainstreaming (including the Women's Resource Centres), mentoring programme for empowerment of young Tajik women politicians, adherence to international human rights obligations and the alignment of the Tajik justice system to OSCE commitments. With regards to other developments in the Human Dimension reported by Ambassador Yrjölä, we commend Tajikistan for the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and express our hope for its swift ratification. We again call on Tajikistan to ratify the Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture.

We are however troubled by recent human rights developments in Tajikistan. We note with concern the case of human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov, who had his sentence increased in 2017 to a total of 28 years. We are also concerned about the current whereabouts and status of political activist and businessman Namunjon Sharipov; and the case of Alijon Sharipov, who was sentenced to 9 and ½ years in prison for liking and sharing videos on social media. We echo the call of the Representative on Freedom of the Media for removal of the 14 journalists from the National Bank list of individuals. We call too for the immediate release of independent journalist and political analyst Khayrullo Mirsaidov, who remains in custody after calling for an investigation into alleged corruption. We remind the Tajik government of the need to fully implement all its OSCE commitments, including respect for human rights and rule of law.

Finally, we once again thank Ambassador Yrjölä for submitting her report. We look forward to hearing her response to our comments and questions.

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 country ICELAND, member 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.