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As prepared for delivery by Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Brent Hartley
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For democratic institutions to function properly, governments must ensure transparency, accountability, and public access to information. At the Istanbul Summit in 1999, OSCE participating States adopted the Charter for European Security in which they recognized that “corruption poses a great threat to the OSCE’s shared values.” Participating States committed “to promote a positive framework for good government practices and public integrity.” Democratic governance reflects the strength and health of democratic institutions, and can also significantly impact economic development and prosperity.

Where the executive branch dominates other branches of government, where civil society is marginalized or repressed, and where media freedom is restricted, meaningful political competition disappears. Those in charge wield their power unchecked and act with impunity, generally putting their own interests ahead of public interests. In such countries, corruption is rife, civil and political rights are imperiled or denied, and the conditions that are essential for democratic institutions to function are absent.

In a number of participating States, despite laws providing for public access to government information—essential to transparency, rule of law, and citizens’ informed participation in political process—government bodies and officials are reluctant to grant such access. Turkmenistan has no law that allows public access to government information.

Corruption erodes the very fabric of society, undermines democratic principles and processes, and diverts resources from serving the public good. Tajikistan’s legal code provides criminal penalties for corruption, which are applicable to government and non-government officials alike, but their application is inconsistent and subject to a lack of political will to bring anyone other than low-level officials to trial. In Kazakhstan, despite several recent instances of high-level officials being held accountable for corruption, those with close ties to the government often escape close scrutiny. In Azerbaijan, there are persistent reports of widespread, unpunished corruption in the civil service, ministries, and at the highest levels of government. Allegations of persistent corruption at all levels of government in Armenia continue as well.

In Uzbekistan, corruption is persistent in law enforcement and education, legal, medical, and traffic enforcement systems. Harassment and intimidation of candidates and campaign workers, abuse of state resources, lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, lack of balanced media coverage, and non-transparent vote-counting processes undermined Ukraine’s October 2012 parliamentary elections, further eroding citizens’ faith in

electoral processes. Anti-corruption experts also noted the extent to which government officials and their relatives and friends had accumulated wealth and influence during the past two years. In Russia, corruption is a persistent, major, national problem, and instances of selective or predatory enforcement of the law for political or undue special interests are raising widespread concerns.

We are confronted with the reality that a number of participating States are among the most corrupt in the world. Some are ranked among the lowest in Transparency International's authoritative Corruption Perceptions Index. Not only is corruption severe and systemic in these countries and benefits the ruling elite, but the legal system becomes a political tool for maintaining power and silencing the opposition. Senior officials are rarely prosecuted, in contrast with members of the political opposition or others who fall out of favor with the government, including civic-minded citizens who try to expose abuses of power.

We hope to work with participating States to address these important issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.