

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 845th SPECIAL MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

Vienna, 23 December 2010

Regarding the sentencing of the journalist Ernest Vardanyan

The European Union deplores the sentencing of Mr. Ernest Vardanyan by a Transdniestrian court to 15 years' imprisonment for spying.

The European Union does not believe that Mr. Vardanyan was able to enjoy all the guarantees of a just and fair trial. It notes in particular that Mr. Vardanyan's family and members of the OSCE mission in Chisinau were refused access to the court during the trial. We call on the *de facto* authorities of the Transdnistria region to ensure that Mr. Vardanyan's fundamental rights are respected, specifically his right to contact his family and receive visits while in detention. The European Union further hopes that Mr. Vardanyan will be able to avail himself of all the procedures for appealing against this sentence.

The European Union encourages the mission to continue to monitor the human rights situation in the Transdnistria region and the judicial procedures with respect to Mr. Vardanyan and also Mr. Kazak, who was arrested on 19 March on grounds of spying and treason and is currently awaiting trial.

The European Union is particularly concerned at the negative signals sent by this conviction as regards respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Transdnistria region. It underscores that civil society representatives must be able to work freely and without fear of being subjected to arbitrary reprisals.

The European Union will continue to follow closely the situation regarding Mr. Vardanyan and Mr. Kazak.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia¹, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Iceland² and Montenegro¹; the Stabilisation and Association Process countries and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia; the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Norway; as well as Georgia align themselves with this statement.

1 Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

2 Iceland continues to be a member of the European Free Trade Association and the European Economic Area.