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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 832
Vienna, 28 October 2010**

EU statement on Media Freedom in Tajikistan

The European Union wishes to express its growing concern about the media freedom situation in Tajikistan. We fully share the analysis set out in the press statement on media pluralism in Tajikistan issued by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on 18 October. The recent developments reported by Ms Mijatović cast further doubt on the government's readiness to facilitate the development of a pluralistic, free and independent media in Tajikistan.

The EU has already expressed concern in the Permanent Council this year about the series of libel lawsuits brought by public officials and public agencies against a number of newspapers. Worryingly, these lawsuits were filed during the campaign period prior to February's parliamentary election. We were alarmed to hear of the court decisions to award substantial and disproportionate damages to the plaintiffs. We are concerned that if these decisions are upheld by the higher courts, several newspapers will be forced to close and an atmosphere of intimidation across the media sector will be created. This would directly and indirectly threaten media pluralism in Tajikistan.

We are also disturbed to hear evidence of websites being blocked and of newspapers and printing houses being harassed by the tax authorities. The EU would like to recall that freedom of expression as well as access to free and

independent media, including on the Internet, are key elements of a functioning democracy.

The EU also wishes to reiterate a point it made at the last meeting of the Permanent Council on 12 October. We support the government of Tajikistan's efforts to ensure the security and stability of the country, and we recognise the considerable challenge this presents. At the same time, we remind the Tajik authorities of the need to conduct their activities in accordance with OSCE commitments, not least in respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, especially the freedom of speech, and the rule of law.

We appeal to the government of Tajikistan to heed the advice of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to recognise the importance of media pluralism and to reverse the negative trend in respect of media freedom. We urge the government to co-operate with Ms Mijatović to address the specific issues she has raised and to draw on the expertise and knowledge of her Office, and of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, in a renewed attempt to fulfil its OSCE commitments on media freedom.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area NORWAY, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

** Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.