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EU statement on Media Freedom in Kazakhstan

The EU recalls its statement of 22 January following the arrest of Mr Ramazan Yesergepov, editor of the weekly Alma-Ata Info, on charges of disclosing state secrets. We are deeply concerned to learn that Mr Yesergepov was sentenced to three years imprisonment following a trial held behind closed doors. EU observers were denied access to the proceedings.

The EU's concern at the treatment meted out to Mr Yesergepov is shared by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr Haraszti. We are aware also that media organisations and civil society representatives in Kazakhstan have voiced their condemnation of charges which they assert were politically motivated.

As we have said on a number of occasions, journalists should not be subject to the same obligations with regard to non-disclosure of official government information which might be imposed on public servants and state officials, but should be free to report on all issues of interest to the public, including commentary on how the state is

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run. Investigative journalists have a crucial role to play in holding governments to account. By revealing possible wrong-doings of the authorities they serve the development of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We regret that the EU has had cause to express its concern with regard to freedom of the media in Kazakhstan on a number of occasions. We call on Kazakhstan, as it approaches its Chairmanship in 2010, to fulfil all its OSCE commitments without reserve, including those on freedom of the media. In this particular instance, we ask that the Kazakh authorities release Mr Yesergepov pending a full review of his case and permit him to recommence publication of Alma-Ata Info.

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

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