



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 961
Vienna, 18 July 2013**

**EU statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Office
in Yerevan, H.E. Ambassador Andrey Sorokin**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Sorokin to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report.

We support the Office's activities in all three dimensions and are pleased to note that the Office continues to enjoy good cooperation with the Government and with civil society. We welcome Ambassador Sorokin's assessment that Government policies "remain consistent with a reform agenda".

We note the improvements in electoral process observed by both the Office and ODIHR during the Presidential and Yerevan City Council elections, notably its improved administration, including ensuring freer campaigning by candidates and the better quality of voter lists. However, public trust in the process remains low and several issues of serious concern were also identified. We would therefore encourage the Government of Armenia to continue to work with the OSCE and in particular, ODIHR to address the issues raised in their election observation reports. We would further encourage an inclusive and transparent process of preparing amendments to election-related legislation, in line with their recommendations. We would like to hear the Ambassador's views on which parts of the ODIHR report he considers particularly important and on how he is intending to focus the Office's work to help address these.

Democratic progress is not limited solely to improved elections. We therefore continue to support the Office's work, in cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR, on reforming the judiciary and the criminal justice system, which is complemented by considerable EU support in this area. We also strongly endorse the Office's work on good governance and the fight against corruption. In particular we welcome the Office's assistance in efforts to reduce the administrative burden for business

and to improve the investment climate, including through the regulatory Guillotine project.

We would encourage the Government of Armenia to adopt amendments to the legislation on broadcasting, ensuring pluralism in the broadcasting media, to finalise the draft law on Conscience and Religious Freedoms as well as the legislation on alternative civilian service, in conformity with recommendations by the Venice Commission and the OSCE, and to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, with support of the EU Delegation and the Human Rights Defender of Armenia.

Our support for the Office's work in assisting the Armenian Government's police reform programme is well known. We are pleased that there have been significant improvements in this area and note that the Office will need to remain engaged in this project over the medium term to help ensure its long term sustainability. We also reiterate our support for the Office's work on human rights in the armed forces and welcome the improvements made. We would encourage the government of Armenia to continue its work on security sector reform.

Your report rightly focuses on your successes and where you consider the Office is adding value. However, we would welcome the opportunity to hear where you might have faced specific challenges in delivering projects and how you have managed to put into practice the lessons learned. We would also like to hear what steps the Office has taken to exchange best practice with other Field Offices and in particular, any specific examples of cross-dimensional co-operation. We reiterate the importance of coordinating with the wider donor community, allowing the Office to focus and build on areas of particular expertise. In this context, we would welcome hearing how the Office co-operates with the offices of the EU, including the EU Advisory Group, or the Council of Europe.

We note the Ambassador's comments regarding secondments and resources. However, in a challenging resource climate, OSCE operations need to be leaner and sharper in fulfilling their mandate effectively. This may include the necessity to reprioritize and improve the focus of the programmatic structures and activities of Field Operations. We would encourage the office to make full use of the OSCE

Evaluation Framework for next year's PBPR, in order that a better measurement of impact can be made.

We reiterate our commitment to strengthening relations with Armenia. We are particularly interested in making further progress on issues related to the agenda of the EU Eastern Partnership in view of the forthcoming Summit in November 2013 in Vilnius.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Ambassador Sorokin and his team for their work and wish them all the best for their future endeavours.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA, align themselves with this statement.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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