



## German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

### **663<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council**

**30 April 2007**

## Statement of the European Union in response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, H.E. Marat Tazhin

The EU warmly welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, H.E. Marat Tazhin to the Permanent Council. We are pleased to see him here so soon after his appointment and regard this as a sign of the importance that Kazakhstan attaches to the OSCE.

The EU attaches high value to its relationship with Kazakhstan and thanks Foreign Minister Tazhin for hosting the recent EU Troika and Central Asia Foreign Ministers meeting in Astana. The meeting contributed to further the elaboration of the EU Strategy for Central Asia. Participants agreed to intensify co-operation in a number of fields, including human rights, the rule of law, education, trade, border management, energy and water. Clearly, many of these areas are particularly relevant to the OSCE, and the EU looks forward to continuing and expanding its co-operation with Kazakhstan, as well as with the other Central Asian states, also in the OSCE context.

One of the principal instruments of this co-operation is the OSCE Centre in Almaty. The EU notes with satisfaction the good relationship between the Centre and its host country, and we are confident that this positive situation will continue after the move of the main office to Astana. We look forward to the timely renewal of the mandate for the Centre and attach particular importance to maintaining a fully operational liaison office in Almaty.

The EU thanks Foreign Minister Tazhin for his confirmation of Kazakhstan's continued readiness to assume the responsibility for chairing the OSCE and notes his outline of possible Kazakh priorities. The EU welcomes Kazakh aspirations to play a leading role in the OSCE and reiterates its long-held view that any Chairmanship-in-Office must exemplify the principles of the organisation and be committed to full compliance with all OSCE undertakings and standards. The EU is pleased that Kazakhstan regards its bid for the Chairmanship as an opportunity to provide a stimulus for reform, thus contributing to the fulfilment of its OSCE commitments.

In this regard, we will follow with interest progress in implementing steps to modernise Kazakhstan, including through political reforms, as outlined by President Nazarbayev in a recent public address. Among the issues to which the EU will pay special attention are the protection and promotion of human rights, freedom of the media, improvements in the electoral system in line with ODIHR recommendations, complete abolition of the death penalty, the strengthening of civil society and political parties and the enhancement of the judicial and law enforcement system. In this context, we welcome the Kazakh Parliament's decision to consider a new draft media law. This positive development among others was highlighted recently by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, who suggested that the eventual passing of the law would address most of the shortcomings of last year's restrictive amendments. But we hope for further improvement, for instance in fully recognising print press outlets as civil businesses in no need of government approval.

We are very interested in the activities of the Working Group established in order to prepare amendments to the Constitution as well as separate draft laws in line with some of the recommendations of the State Commission on development and concretization of democratic reforms. We thank Foreign Minister Tazhin for the information he has provided in this regard today and look forward to seeing concrete outcomes at an early date which will enable Kazakhstan to develop a track record of implementation of reforms and demonstrate its commitment to our common values and principles.

The EU commends Kazakhstan's efforts to promote regional security, stability and cooperation in Central Asia. We are therefore convinced that Kazakhstan can play an important role in furthering OSCE values and commitments in the region.

The EU stands ready to assist Kazakhstan to implement its political and democratic reforms. We encourage Kazakhstan to avail itself of the expertise which can be provided by the OSCE, notably through its institutions and the Centre in the country.

We would like to thank Foreign Minister Tazhin once again for addressing the Permanent Council today and wish him and his country success in pursuing their ambitious reform agenda.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA country Iceland, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

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