



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No 1147 Vienna, 25 May 2017

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, H.E. Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä**

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The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Yrjölä to the Permanent Council and thank her for her comprehensive report.

We continue to value highly the work of the Office in Tajikistan. The uncertainty around the Office's mandate has had a considerable impact on the work of the Office and its staff, in particular staff working in the 5 field offices. We trust the new mandate, enabling the Office to continue its work in all three dimensions, will be agreed soon to relieve this uncertainty.

We nevertheless commend the Office for the valuable work it has been able to achieve. We particularly welcome the development of a mid-term strategy, as part of a reform process, which will, we hope, serve as a strong basis for the future development of the Office. We also welcome the intention to create a communication strategy, which will help the Office increase its visibility in the country.

While we welcome the possible focus areas for further engagement, it will be very important to maintain an element of flexibility as complex new security challenges evolve. In light of the foreseen closure of the 5 field offices, it will be even more important for the Office to work flexibly across the entire country.

It will be important also to take a fully cross-dimensional approach on the basis of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. A key part to this will be working closely with civil society partners. In this regard, we must express our deep concern over the continuing reduction in political diversity in Tajikistan, and the increasing danger that the denial of human rights, freedom of expression, association and of peaceful assembly gives fuel to organisations and individuals who espouse more radical responses. We therefore attach high importance to the Office's work on

strengthening political dialogue between government and civil society, including involving youth.

Given the OSCE-wide challenges posed by radicalisation and extremism, we value the Office's work on promoting a human-rights compliant approach to countering terrorism. We support the Office's work on involving civil society in police reform, and encourage the Government to progress its intention to introduce a community policing approach. We encourage coordination with the EU in these activities as well as continued co-operation with the Office in Bishkek and other OSCE presences in the region

We reiterate our support for the work of both the Office and the Border Management Staff College (BMSC); in particular, activities that help build trust and reduce the potential for conflict between neighbouring forces. We greatly value the work of the BMSC and we repeat our call for it to be included at least partially in the Unified Budget to provide more sustainable funding.

In the second dimension, we prioritise the Office's work on anti-corruption. We appreciate the benefits of the Office's capacity-building, advice and legislative review work, but note that ultimate responsibility for embracing reform lies with the Government at the highest levels.

We expect Tajikistan to respect its OSCE and international commitments. We are concerned by arrests and trials of opposition party members, human rights defenders and their lawyers. Likewise, we voice our concern at the continued restrictive media environment and selected blocking of internet sites as well as the failure to date to include private broadcasters in the switchover to digital broadcasting.

Nevertheless, we are encouraged by progress in some areas where the assistance of the Office in Tajikistan has been instrumental. We commend the Office's long-standing work on changing the culture of impunity for law enforcement authorities accused of torture and ill-treatment, and for empowering women, not least in relation to domestic violence. We also welcome the Tajik Government's commitment to abolish the death penalty, to join the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to strengthen the protection of victims of domestic violence. However, we regret that recommendations on amendments to the law on religion and

the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) remain to be implemented.

Going forward, we expect the Office to assist the Government implement Human Dimension commitments, in particular, those related to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of religion or belief, and the continued work to mainstream rule of law and human rights principles into police reform.

We thank the Office for its extensive contributions to the work of the OSCE Committees in Vienna, including participation in this week's Security and Economic and Environmental Committees and in last month's Human Dimension Committee on Gender Equality.

We reiterate the importance of evaluation, and specifically the need to assess the impact of the Office's activities at outcome level. We commend Ambassador Yrjölä's intention to concentrate on delivering sustainable results from the planned reform processes. In that regard we encourage the Office to use presentations to the PC and similar opportunities to showcase some of your key achievements.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you and your staff again for your dedicated work throughout the year. As a long term partner of Tajikistan the EU will continue to support the government of Tajikistan to increase the social economic development, good governance, rule of law, democratisation and respect for human rights.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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