



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1236 Vienna, 18 July 2019**

### **EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, Ambassador Valeriu Chiveri**

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Chiveri to his first Permanent Council and thanks him for presenting his detailed and extremely useful report. We are grateful for the work that has gone into producing it.

The EU attaches great importance to the work of the OSCE Office in Dushanbe and the 25 years of OSCE presence in Tajikistan. We also appreciate the valuable cooperation between the OSCE Office and the EU Delegation to Tajikistan.

Through the adoption of a new EU Central Asia Strategy, we have set out a fresh strategic vision and policy framework for our partnership with Central Asia. Working collaboratively with the OSCE and the field missions, including the Programme Office in Dushanbe, will be an important component of the Strategy and we look forward to enhancing further our cooperation.

In the last 25 years, the OSCE presence in Tajikistan has indeed achieved a great deal for the benefit of the people of Tajikistan. We also greatly welcome Tajikistan's increased engagement with the OSCE, including through its current chairing of the Forum for Security Cooperation and through recent visits to Tajikistan of the HCNM and ODIHR Director to increase dialogue.

We regret the closure of the five field offices in 2017, and reiterate the importance of the Office continuing to work unhindered across Tajikistan to benefit people in all regions. We were pleased to note details of the Office's regional work in the report.

We strongly support the ongoing use of the Partnership Platform – a collaborative, multi stakeholder process to set the Office's forward agenda on a strategic level, and review progress - and note that the next meeting of the Platform will take place later this summer. We were pleased to note that civil society stakeholders will be included in that meeting. This participation is essential for both successful project implementation and effective programme planning. The Office's access to and interaction with civil society should be unhindered, and co-operation with the OSCE Office and structures should have no detrimental consequences for those civil society organisations.

We welcome the report's focus on activity across all three OSCE dimensions and support the Office's efforts in that regard. We also appreciate your work to mainstream human rights and gender perspectives throughout the Office's activities.

We value the work of the Border Management Staff College (BMSC). Now 10 years old, it continues to play a key role in building capacity of the border-related agencies of Tajikistan, neighbouring countries and beyond. We therefore repeat our call for the BMSC to be funded from the Unified Budget, at least partially, to provide much-needed financial stability and spend less time on fundraising.

We repeat our condemnation of the July 2018 terrorist attack in Tajikistan, claimed by ISIL/Da'esh, which claimed the lives of four tourists. To strengthen our engagement with Tajikistan on CT/VERLT, the EU co-sponsored the High-level International Conference on "International and Regional Cooperation on Countering Terrorism and its Financing Through Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime" which took place in Dushanbe on 17 May 2019.

We welcome the Office's community-based approach to tackling VERLT and the approach to ensure that the fight against VERLT is not at the expense of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We welcome the decline in the poverty rate in Tajikistan and the positive signs in the Tajik economy in 2018. The EU within the framework of the OSCE and through its bilateral co-operation programmes stands ready to support the authorities of Tajikistan to reinforce further public trust in institutions, which can contribute to greater investment and prosperity. We particularly welcome the Office's anti-corruption work in the second dimension. We hope the deepening relations between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan will bring security and economic benefits to people in all three countries.

We are concerned about the human rights situation in Tajikistan and in this context we stress the importance of the Office's activities in the Human Dimension. We welcome the focus on empowering women and strengthening their role in public and political life, human rights education, adherence to international human rights obligations, and the alignment of the Tajik justice system to OSCE commitments. We commend Tajikistan for signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and express our hope for its swift ratification. We reiterate the importance of work to prevent torture and other forms of ill-treatment and again call on Tajikistan to ratify the Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture.

We also consider work on freedom of the media and freedom of expression to be a priority and recall in this regard the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media's call on the Tajik authorities to reinstate access to numerous web resources, including online media, social platforms and Google services. We echo the RFoM's call upon the authorities to reconsider the withdrawal of accreditation for a Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) correspondent in Dushanbe. The issue of delayed, denied and withdrawn accreditation of Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty journalists needs to be urgently addressed. We call on authorities to implement all OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom in full.

We are deeply troubled by the two deadly riots in high-security prisons in Khujand and Vahdat, which claimed the lives of more than 50 inmates and prison guards in November 2018 and May 2019; and by media reports earlier in July that 14 prisoners in a convoy travelling from Khujand prison to Dushanbe prison died from food poisoning. We deplore this loss of life and continue to follow developments closely. We call on the Tajik government to ensure that prison conditions are in line with

OSCE commitments and encourage discussion with the Office on how the OSCE might support this work. We also call for in-depth investigations involving independent bodies such as the ICRC into the circumstances that led to these tragic incidents.

Finally, we once again thank Ambassador Chiveri for submitting his report. We look forward to hearing his response to our comments.

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

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