

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1052
Vienna, 14 May 2015**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Head of the
OSCE Office in Tajikistan, H.E. Ambassador Markus Müller**

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

We continue to place an emphasis on Tajikistan remaining a priority area for OSCE support across all three dimensions of security. The Office in Tajikistan plays an important role in assisting the government to further the implementation of OSCE commitments. We value the collaborative approach that the Office enjoys with the host government and civil society, not least through the Task Force process of agreeing priority areas for OSCE activity. We urge that OSCE activities arising out of this approach are based on measured evaluation of where the Office has the potential and expertise to deliver practical benefits. In this respect, we welcome evaluation measures such as the perception review on Tajik-Afghan cross-border trade which effectively demonstrated the value of the OSCE's Cross Border Market Resource Centres. We encourage you to continue such enhancements to internal and external evaluation methods.

We are encouraged by the increase in cooperative regional activities such as the work on border management and conflict prevention with Kyrgyzstan, which appear to be demonstrating practical benefits. We also highly value the Office's inclusion of Afghan officials in capacity-building activities where appropriate. Such activities help break down barriers and encourage a more open and transparent approach to regional security.

We attach critical importance to retaining a space for peaceful opposition and alternative views to be expressed in Tajikistan. Current tendencies to silence such voices, including through the blocking of websites, risks driving them underground,

with the danger that those denied a legitimate political outlet for their opinions turn to more radical or extreme solutions. In this respect, we were deeply alarmed by regressive developments, including the harassment of opposition politicians and activists, in the run-up to the Parliamentary elections in March. We regret that these elections took place in a restricted political space and failed to provide a level playing field for candidates. Although some improvements were made to the electoral law, restrictions on the right to stand, freedoms of expression and assembly and access to media limited the opportunity to make a free and informed choice. We urge the Tajik authorities to effectively address the shortcomings identified by the OSCE/ODIHR.

We attach a high importance to the Office's work on strengthening political dialogue, political pluralism and cooperation with civil society. We welcome the Office's work in assisting the Government of Tajikistan draft legislation on police reform, in particular fostering the inclusion of civil society in discussions. In a similar vein, we welcome the Office's co-operation with the Inter-Agency Working Group drafting a national strategy to prevent and counter Violent Extremism and Radicalisation leading to Terrorism. This issue is likely to be a key feature in the future stability and security of Tajikistan and we encourage the Office to share the OSCE's substantial expertise in this area in order to assist the government develop both top-down and bottom-up approaches that are fully compliant with Tajikistan's human rights commitments.

We continue to support the valuable work of both the Office and the Border Management Staff College in the area of border security and encourage you to continue work on merging the division of labour between the two where practicable. We are concerned that the College's financial position continues to be insecure and agree with you that there is a need to put the BMSC on a more sustainable funding, and to include as a minimum at least some of the BMSC's core costs in the Unified Budget in the interests of stability and predictability. Having to divert energy to fund-raising diminishes the level of attention that can be paid to the core task of capacity-building. In a similar vein, we do not think that the increased emphasis being placed on the College's research and analysis work is appropriate at this juncture.

In the second dimension, we agree that stimulating the domestic economy, foreign

investment and local employment will be a key factor in Tajikistan's future security. We encourage the Office to concentrate on those areas in which the OSCE can best offer assistance – legislative reform, particularly related to anti-corruption, and to work with the government and civil society on the key issue of its effective implementation.

Our concern is growing over Tajikistan's implementation of certain aspects of its OSCE human dimension commitments, particularly related to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly and freedom of religion or belief. We believe the OSCE can play a valuable role in these areas. We strongly support the Office's work in promoting and facilitating dialogue between government agencies and civil society on the development of laws, policy and practices. In this respect, we were encouraged that Office-facilitated dialogue resulted in the Ministry of Justice agreeing significant amendments to the draft Law on Public Associations.

We note that there were promising developments related to torture prevention and eradication, particularly related to compensation cases, and encourage the Government and Office to continue pursuing effective implementation of recent amendments to the Criminal Code. We also continue to see value in the Office's activities related to gender-based violence and welcome increased attention being paid to the growing area of trafficking in human beings. We encourage the Office to step up its activities to support freedom of the media, including on-line media, given the concerns expressed on several occasions by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In conclusion, we thank Ambassador Müller and his staff throughout Tajikistan for their dedicated work throughout the year, despite the human and financial resource constraints and offer you our full support for your planned activities in 2016.

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

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