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Irish Presidency of the European Union

Permanent Council No. 508 27 May 2004

EU Statement under current issues on Uzbekistan

The European Union attaches high importance to co-operation with Uzbekistan. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan testifies to this and records the firm commitment of the Union and Uzbekistan to the full implementation of all principles and provisions in the fundamental documents of the OSCE. This Agreement states inter alia that respect for democracy, the principles of international law and human rights constitute essential elements of partnership. In this context, the EU wishes to return to some issues discussed in the Permanent Council earlier this year.

Parliamentary Elections in Uzbekistan are to be held in December. The EU is concerned that Uzbekistan may not succeed in adequately preparing for a transparent and democratic process in line with international standards. We have grave concerns about the ban on opposition parties participating in these elections. The EU urges the Uzbek authorities to strengthen their efforts to ensure free and fair elections. In particular, we strongly urge Uzbekistan to draw on the unique and recognized expertise of ODIHR and to follow up on ODIHR's assessments and recommendations from previous elections. Implementation will be crucial, and the EU will closely follow this process.

The European Union pays great attention to the working conditions for international organizations and NGOs in Uzbekistan. In this context, we regret the fact that the Open Society Institute was denied re-registration in April 2004. This follows the decision last year to de-register the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the imposed departure of the International Crisis Group representative. The European Union calls on Uzbekistan to review this decision and to grant re-registration to the NGOs where the decision is still pending. We are also concerned about increasing restrictions on the activities of those NGOs that have been registered.

The European Union will continue to observe closely the implementation of the recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and hopes that, following the recent publication of the "Plan of Action to implement the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or

Punishment”, tangible progress will be achieved. We remain deeply concerned about a number of cases of deaths in custody, allegedly as a result of torture. We ask the Delegation of Uzbekistan to provide information on the most recent case, that of Andrei Shelkavenko, as well as updating the Permanent Council on investigations of earlier cases.

The European Union reiterates its willingness to work together with Uzbekistan in a common effort to promote and implement OSCE values and principles, based on mutual trust.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria and Romania align themselves with this statement.