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Prohlášení

Statement

Déclaration

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EU Statement in response to the address by the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador Istvan Venczel

The EU warmly welcomes Ambassador Venczel back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU supports the Project Coordinator's activities across the three dimensions, designed to assist Uzbekistan in meeting its OSCE commitments and pursuing its reform and democratization efforts. We particularly welcome the Project Coordinator's endeavours to take a regional perspective in a number of areas. We encourage him to continue his close dialogue both with the Uzbek government and civil society and to seek intensive NGO participation in his project activities.

We urge the Uzbek government to improve project approval procedures so as to allow for a better use of budget resources. Progress in this area would allow for an expansion of activity in the next year. Furthermore, we note with some disappointment that also in 2008 Uzbekistan has not lived up to its obligation to contribute to the OSCE's Unified Budget.

We strongly support the Project Coordinator's efforts to enhance cooperation between the Uzbek authorities and OSCE institutions such as the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the ODIHR, as well as the Parliamentary Assembly. We welcome the fact that the Representative

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on Freedom of the Media as well as the High Commissioner on National Minorities have visited the country on various occasions as a sign of increased cooperation and dialogue with these institutions.

In view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections on 27 December, we fully share the Project Coordinator's call for an early dialogue between the Uzbek government and the ODIHR on potential OSCE assistance, given that previous elections in Uzbekistan have failed to show genuine political competition and have not met OSCE commitments. In this regard, we also welcome the Project Coordinator's activities aimed at strengthening the role of political parties, improving voter education and ensuring compliance with election legislation as well as increasing the political participation of citizens and the transparency of elections.

In the politico-military dimension, the EU fully supports the Project Coordinator's assistance to the Uzbek government, including in countering the violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism, illegal drug trafficking and other transnational threats and challenges. We also commend the assistance provided to promote integrated border management and sharing of good practices in police training. We welcome the Uzbek government's determination to actively address these challenges in close co-operation with local authorities, OSCE institutions and other relevant actors, including in a regional context. We encourage the Project Co-ordinator to coordinate closely its activities with other International Organisations.

In the second dimension, we are pleased to learn about the Project Coordinator's activities promoting good governance as well as supporting the fight against corruption and money-laundering. We support projects

which help to strengthen the legal framework for economic activities such as technical assistance in settling business disputes and to enhancing the legal protection system for entrepreneurs. We encourage the Project Coordinator to continue to promote the participation of women in business and other gender-relevant activities. We welcome his environmental activities, in particular those fostering ENVSEC as well as addressing water management, and the involvement of relevant international actors in this regard.

In the Human Dimension, the EU welcomes the abolition of the death penalty and the introduction of Habeas Corpus in 2008. We are, however, concerned that restrictions to media freedom, maltreatment against prisoners and harassment of human rights defenders persist, and expect positive steps in these areas. In this context, the EU attaches great importance to the Project Coordinator's activities such as capacity building of the Ombudsperson Institution and of the Human Rights Protection Unit of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Interior; strengthening of legal education, and providing assistance to the National Association of NGOs. We reiterate the importance we attach to the EU-Uzbek human rights dialogue, which was continued only last week in Tashkent.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Ambassador Venczel and his team for their dedicated work and wish them success in their future activities.

The candidate countries CROATIA* and FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY, as

well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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