



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1100
Vienna, 12 May 2016**

**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 Mueller back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

We continue to highly value the work of the Office in Tajikistan, commend its collaborative approach to programmatic activity, and particularly value the intention to develop a five-year strategy. Given calls to develop new thematic areas, we commend your intention to concentrate on delivering sustainable results from current reform processes, whilst maintaining an element of flexibility. As complex new security challenges evolve, we can only endorse the importance of taking a fully cross-dimensional approach on the basis of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. We also see value in taking a more strategic approach to common challenges faced by neighbouring OSCE field missions, and in this regard welcome the Office in Tajikistan's exploration of further cooperation with the Centre in Bishkek. We would be interested to hear more about cooperation with EU programmes in the region, such as Border Management in Northern Afghanistan and the Border Management Programme in Central Asia.

We note that the Office in Tajikistan is increasingly implementing its activities directly, and would be interested to know whether this is because of difficulty in finding civil society partners. Has the OSCE been adversely affected by last year's amendments to the Law on Public Associations relating to foreign funding of NGOs?

In this regard, we express our deep concern over the continuing reduction in political diversity in Tajikistan, and the increasing danger that those denied the right to freedom of expression will turn to more radical solutions. 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 highly 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 mode. We welcome the fact that the OSCE and ODIHR were invited to comment on the draft national strategy on Violent Extremism and Radicalisation leading to Terrorism and encourage the Government to take their recommendations into account. In this connection, we appreciate that Tajikistan presented a voluntary report on countering terrorism at the Security Committee on 18 April.

We reiterate our support for the work of both the Office and the Border Management Staff College, in particular activities that help build trust and reduce the potential for conflict between neighbouring forces. We repeat our call for the College to be included at least partially in the Unified Budget. We also call for additional funds to be allocated to the Office, in the context of growing security challenges.

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 regret and are concerned by the fact that the Office is restricted in its ability to assist the Government implement some of its Human Dimension commitments, in particular those related to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of religion or belief. We regret that anticipated progress with respect to the criminal code and criminal procedure, as well as in relation to the creation of an independent bar association, was not realised and has been adversely affected by counter-terrorism efforts.

We expect Tajikistan to adhere to 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 selected blocking of internet sites and 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 your 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 thank the Office for their extensive contributions to the work of the OSCE Committees in Vienna. We acknowledge the Office's increased focus on results, follow-up and implementation of lessons learned, for example on the Parents against Terrorism programme, and encourage more impact-based evaluation to ensure the efficient use of resources.

In conclusion, we thank you and your staff for your dedicated work throughout the year. In particular, we express our deep-felt appreciation for your years of dedicated commitment to conflict-prevention and development in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. We wish you a fruitful and well-deserved retirement.

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, the EFTA country NORWAY as well as UKRAINE 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.