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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 965
Vienna, 19 September 2013**

**EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the
OSCE Office in Tajikistan, H.E. Ambassador Markus
Mueller**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Mueller for the first time in his new capacity as Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan and thank him for his comprehensive report.

We value highly the excellent work of the Office and commend the transparent and constructive process by which priorities are agreed through discussion with government and civil society. The value of this balanced approach is seen in positive developments across all three dimensions which jointly contribute to enhancing Tajikistan's image and attractiveness as an international economic partner.

We note the increasingly strategic role of Tajikistan as transition in Afghanistan gathers pace. We believe it will be important to maintain an effectively staffed and well-resourced office capable of providing balanced advice and support to Tajikistan across all dimensions in this particularly sensitive period.

We warmly welcome Tajikistan's accession to the WTO as a very positive signal of its desire and commitment to fully engage in the world economy. But there is much work to do now to keep up the momentum and to ensure full compliance with WTO regulations, as well as to further improve the business and investment climates. We believe that the Office can play a useful advisory role in this process and help reassure the business community of Tajikistan's ongoing commitment to economic reform.

We support enhanced OSCE cooperation with Afghanistan. We welcome the increasing inclusion of Afghan officials in training programmes in

Tajikistan, as well as cooperation on mine action, and agree with Ambassador Mueller that this is an area that could be further strengthened and developed.

We remain concerned however that there continues to be a lack of transparency and accountability over the events in Khorog in summer 2012. We fear that a continuing sense of injustice and discrimination is not conducive to fostering security, promoting reconciliation or providing long-term stability in such a strategic location.

We welcome legislative and policy developments against torture and prevention of domestic violence, and call for effective implementation in order to strengthen the rule of law. We believe that the Office is well placed to assist in this regard.

We note that Presidential elections are due on 6 November and welcome the President's stated commitment to hold free and fair elections. We trust that Tajikistan, in accordance with its Copenhagen commitments, will co-operate fully with OSCE/ODIHR and that the Tajik Central Commission on Elections and Referenda will fully implement the recommendations of previous missions, particularly with respect to equal opportunity of participation for all parties and voters. In this regard, we are seriously concerned that some opposition parties and media are alleging harassment and undue pressure. We encourage the Tajik Government to ensure that the trial on corruption and other charges of Zayd Saidov, the founder of the "New Tajikistan" political party is open, transparent and in full accordance with the rule of law.

In the Political-Military Dimension, we welcome the Office's role in strengthening border security and management, in particular its focus on a regional dimension including Afghanistan. We consider this an activity where the OSCE in Tajikistan is creating best practice. We value the work of the Border Management Staff College and are therefore encouraged by its recent positive external evaluation which we will study carefully with a view to strengthening its future sustainability.

In addition, we would like to express our appreciation to the authorities of Tajikistan for good co-operation with EU funded programmes on border management and the fight against illegal drugs. We stand ready to continue this approach in co-operation with the OSCE as appropriate.

We welcome the Presidential Decree adopting the police reform strategy and fully support the Office's work in helping the government implement the principles of democratic policing. We would also support the OSCE assisting the government in drafting a national strategy to counter Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (VERLT).

In the Economic and Environment Dimension, we welcome the narrowed focus on areas closer to core OSCE strengths, particularly activities related to good governance and corruption, which are closely related to improving internal stability and security.

We regard the Human Dimension as an essential component of the Office's work in helping Tajikistan's development and security. We therefore welcome the Presidential approval of the State Programme for Human Rights Education.

We also welcome the new media law partially decriminalising libel and defamation and encourage further steps in this direction if Tajikistan is to fully implement its commitments to media freedom. However, we are seriously concerned by regular blockages of news and social network sites and recall that human rights are inalienable and that they therefore must apply online as well as offline.

In conclusion, we agree that it is right that the office should focus on building local staff capacity. We welcome the office's tighter focus on OSCE strengths and priorities, and despite the challenging resource climate, consider it important to continue supporting Tajikistan at this sensitive time. Finally, we thank the Ambassador and his staff in all the Field Offices for their excellent work in contributing to Tajikistan's development.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.