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EU statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, H.E. Ambassador Ivar Vikki

The European Union warmly welcomes His Excellency Ambassador Vikki back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU commends Ambassador Vikki and his team in Dushanbe for their efforts to promote the effective implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in Tajikistan across all three dimensions. We also pay tribute to the valuable work undertaken by the five Field Offices. The recently developed strategic partnership between the Office, the OSCE institutions, the Government of Tajikistan and Tajik civil society has laid solid foundations for effective OSCE programme activity.

The EU recognizes that the Office has undergone a period of considerable change. It has a new name, new premises, a new reinforced mandate and a new management structure. Its activities have also expanded. We believe this process has been well managed and has raised the quality of assistance provided to the host country.

The EU agrees with Ambassador Vikki that a period of consolidation and continuity is now needed. This means a sustained focus on

strengthening border management and security, fostering cross-border co-operation, and promoting human rights and democratic values. We recognise that the integration of Afghan officials and other stakeholders in the programmes and projects of the Office contribute to increasing the stability in the region.

The EU supports the main elements of the programmatic activities in the 1st Dimension, notably those designed to help the Tajik authorities to combat violent extremism and radicalization, to implement the National Border Strategy and to improve cross border co-operation with its neighboring States. We consider that the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe has made a promising start. We also value efforts to help Tajikistan to deliver on police reform, to increase its counter terrorism capacity, and to rid the country of small arms and light weapons, as well as landmines. On this last point, we also commend the Office in Tajikistan's progress towards addressing the landmine contamination in Central Asia.

In the second dimension, the EU supports the focus of the Office on promoting good governance and combating corruption. We also support efforts to assist Tajikistan in addressing energy security, water management and the transportation of goods, especially at the trans-boundary level in order to boost regional cooperation and stability.

Some worrying developments in Tajikistan underline the continued importance of the Office's human dimension Programme. First, ODIHR's assessment of the parliamentary elections held in February revealed many shortcomings. The Office should assist the Tajik authorities to

implement ODIHR's recommendations on both the legal framework and the administration of the electoral process.

Second, a series of lawsuits against media organisations earlier this year cast doubt on Tajikistan's determination to develop a pluralistic, free and independent media. The Office should continue its efforts to help Tajikistan in this area, drawing on the considerable expertise of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Third, the recent case of the Kyrgyz Human Rights Defender, Nematillo Botakuziev illustrates that Tajikistan needs to strengthen the rule of law and do more to protect human rights. We therefore support the Office's efforts to build the capacity of the Tajik authorities to implement criminal justice reform, to support the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman and to promote human rights awareness.

Finally Mr Chairman, we would like once again to thank Ambassador Vikki for addressing the Permanent Council today. He can be proud of his Office's work in helping Tajikistan to pursue its democratic reform agenda and to strengthen security. We wish him success in the period ahead and can assure him of the continued strong support of the European Union.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

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