



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 956
Vienna, 13 June 2013**

**EU statement in response to Ambassador Natalia Zarudna,
Head of the OSCE Centre in Astana**

The EU warmly welcomes Ambassador Zarudna back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her useful and comprehensive report.

The EU fully supports the work of the Centre which aims to assist Kazakhstan's reform process in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We welcome the Centre's engagement in areas such as legal and justice system reform, combating transnational threats while enhancing respect for human rights, and promoting media freedom. The Centre increasingly focuses on building the host country's capacities, which is a positive development.

We consider Kazakhstan's "Strategy 2050" a promising project when it comes to strengthening local government and would suggest that this could be a potential area for further cooperation between Kazakhstan and the OSCE.

The EU is pleased that the Centre enjoys an excellent relationship with the host country's authorities and civil society. While the Centre's intention to enhance further consultations with these partners could be advantageous, we underline the need for preserving the Centre's flexibility to work within the full scope of its mandate and with all relevant partners.

During the reporting period, the EU has expressed its concern with developments in Kazakhstan as regards freedom of religion or belief, freedom of the media, and freedom of expression and association as well as with individual cases such as the trial against opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov, who remains imprisoned. We therefore particularly welcome the work of the Centre to follow and help promote reform in these areas. We call on Kazakhstan to make full use of the OSCE's expertise. This also applies in the important area of democratic elections.

Kazakhstan is an active contributor to the promotion of stability and security in Afghanistan, both within and outside the OSCE context, and we support Kazakhstan's engagement in this field as well as the Centre's activities. We reiterate our thanks to Kazakhstan for hosting the 3rd "Heart of Asia" Ministerial Conference on 26 April and continue to support efforts to promote regional cooperation and security.

The EU is of the opinion that a number of these Centre activities benefit from the existence of the Almaty liaison office, which is well placed to play a particularly useful role both in activities involving several countries of the region and those involving NGOs and civil society. We underline our wish to see this useful work in an important area of the Centre's mandate continue in future.

As Ambassador Zarudna notes in her report, Kazakhstan and the EU have agreed to continue to deepen and widen our cooperation. Considering that good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms form a fundamental part of relations and of the political dialogue between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union, during their recent meeting in Kazakhstan, the President of the European Commission and President Nazarbayev agreed on the importance of continuing engagement and cooperation on promoting human right protection and reform of the legal and judicial system. The EU values the converging approach taken by the OSCE on such issues and is convinced that the work of the Centre will contribute to our common goals.

In conclusion, we thank Ambassador Zarudna and her team for their dedicated work and wish them the best of success in their future activities.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, 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, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, 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.