

Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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EU Statement in Response to H.E. Kassymshomart Tokaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan

The EU welcomes H.E. Kassymshomart Tokaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, to the Permanent Council. We greatly value his presence here as a sign of the importance Kazakhstan attaches to the OSCE and to exchanging views with other participating States. We welcome the increased involvement of Kazakhstan in OSCE affairs.

We have listened with interest to the perspective the Minister has provided on developments in Kazakhstan, cooperation with the OSCE and on the government's plans for further reform-oriented steps to be taken. We were further informed about these plans at the recent meetings with H.E. Secretary of State Abdykarimov and his delegation, where we were briefed on the work of the State Commission on the Development and Concretization of the Programme of Democratic Reforms. As we said at the time, we believe that, provided that there is political will, this Commission can be an important vehicle for further strengthening democratic practices and institutions. We look forward to further reforms directed inter alia towards improvement of the electoral system in line with ODIHR recommendations, strengthening of civil society and the independence of the media – including through changes to the law on media - and enhancement of the judicial and law enforcement system. We also attach importance to implementation of commitments on freedom of assembly and to registration of political parties

Kazakhstan has achieved impressive economic development, which should provide increased opportunities for all of the country's inhabitants. The EU is convinced that sustainable economic progress also requires continued political reform to ensure respect for the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

In that regard, the EU reiterates its welcome for Kazakhstan's ratification, without reservations, of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We believe the obligations Kazakhstan has entered into can be an important catalyst for further reform efforts and look forward to early visible progress in implementing them. We would be interested in receiving information on plans and timelines for this and we hope Kazakhstan will also adopt the two Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The EU was pleased to note during the recent Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and again today that Kazakhstan stresses its adherence to OSCE commitments and regards its bid for the OSCE Chairmanship as an opportunity to provide a stronger stimulus for fulfilling these. Let me reiterate that the EU welcomes Kazakhstan's aspirations to take on a leading role in the OSCE. The EU recalls that any Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE must exemplify the principles of

the organisation. It is for Kazakhstan to demonstrate that it is ready and able to commit to full compliance with all OSCE undertakings and standards.

The EU considers that a truly democratic Kazakhstan would be a factor for stability in all of Central Asia. We welcome the emphasis placed by Kazakhstan on promoting OSCE standards and commitments in its region. We welcome too Kazakhstan's efforts in working towards greater regional cooperation in Central Asia. This work is particularly important in fighting the many and multi-faceted threats to security and stability today.

We have noted with great interest the priorities outlined by Foreign Minister Tokaev for a future Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE. We will study these carefully and look forward to receiving the relevant document announced in Warsaw. We take this opportunity to underline that any Chairmanship-in-Office will be faced with a number of challenges arising within all dimensions of the OSCE, which must be dealt with in full accordance with established OSCE practices and commitments.

We have listened carefully to Minister Tokaev's views on a need for reform of the organization and some of its activities. The EU has been, and is, largely satisfied with the OSCE and with the way the Organization operates. It serves well as a forum for political dialogue, and functions well as a key instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. That does not mean, however, that nothing can be improved in order to benefit the Organization and all the participating States. We hope that this process will come to a fruitful conclusion by the end of this year.

The busiest period of the OSCE calendar is approaching and many important issues are before us. We appreciate the fact that Foreign Minister Tokaev has chosen to come here at this particular juncture and look forward to cooperating in a constructive manner with Kazakhstan to ensure a successful outcome of the Brussels Ministerial.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process