



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1268 Vienna, 21 May 2020

EU Statement in response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and of the Director of the Bishkek Academy

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Pierre von Arx back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report. We also warmly welcome the Director of the OSCE Academy, Mr. Alexander Wolters.

We take positive note of the good cooperation established by the Programme Office in Bishkek with the host authorities and the civil society, including through the Consultative Mechanism and the high-level meetings. We welcome the Programme Office's efforts to support the host country in advancing its National Sustainable Development Strategy, while upholding and advancing the implementation of OSCE Commitments in all three dimensions.

We appreciate the priorities identified and the work conducted in all three dimensions. In the First Dimension, we particularly support the capacity-building activities aimed at preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. We also fully support the focus on activities to raise awareness among youth. We recognize the central role OSCE plays in organizing the removal and destruction of highly dangerous mélange rocket fuel from Soviet times from Kyrgyzstan.

In the Second Dimension, we support the Offices activities related to good governance, combating corruption and money laundering, as well as promoting green economy.

With regard to the Third Dimension, we highly welcome the activities related to torture prevention, penitentiary reform, as well as those aimed at combatting trafficking in human beings. We appreciate the Office's efforts to advance legal reforms and

transparent administrative procedures and we call on the Office to continue them. We commend the Office for advancing the concept of inclusive societies with regard to practical activities in the field of freedom of religion and belief, persons with disabilities and women's empowerment.

We welcome the continued support provided by the Programme Office to the elaboration of the 2018–2020 Electoral Legislation Improvement Strategy. We also welcome the foreseen activities related to the upcoming local and parliamentary elections, in line with OSCE commitments. We also take positive note that Kyrgyzstan is already making use of the expertise offered by ODIHR in this field, and we hope that the joint efforts of ODIHR and the Programme Office will contribute to ensuring a smooth, transparent and fair conduct of elections.

We express our concerns regarding the new amendments to the law on Countering Terrorism and the changes to the Code of Civil Procedure, as well regarding the amendments proposed to the law on non-commercial organizations, which could negatively impact the media's activities and freedom of expression in the country, respectively the work of the non-governmental organizations. We hope that the authorities will make use of the assistance that the Programme Office and the OSCE institutions could provide to ensure that the legislation is in line with international obligations and OSCE commitments.

We also take this opportunity to echo the recent call of the ODIHR Director on the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to implement the UN Human Rights Committee decision and free prominent human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, in line with the country's international human rights obligations.

We would appreciate more information on and assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the upcoming work and activities of the Programme Office. In this context, we would also appreciate more information on COVID-19's potential impact on the gradual and sustainable hand-over of projects as discussed in the Consultative Mechanism.

In this context, we would like to inform about the EU's immediate response activities to the health and socio-economic fallout of COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan, which is foreseen to total 36 million €, of which 30.8 million will be disbursed directly to the treasury.

We underline that the OSCE Academy is a flagship project for the OSCE. It is a highly valuable tool to strengthen and spread knowledge and capacities and to increase co-operation and security in Central Asia and with Afghanistan. We are pleased to hear

that the Academy is continuing its academic program of the year despite COVID19-related challenges. We would be interested to hear in due course about the experiences of this year's online admission process for the next academic year and whether this mode should be entirely or partly continued, thus possibly saving on travel costs of the staff involved in the admission process. We underline again that a greater part of the Academy's activities should be included in the Unified Budget.

On this occasion, we draw attention to the recent EU Strategy on Central Asia focusing on promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation in Central Asia. The implementation of this strategy provides a valuable opportunity for the EU and Central Asia to forge a strong and durable partnership. The promotion and protection of rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, civil society, the rights of women and sustainable development, good governance, among others, must remain at the core of these relations. As a long-standing partner of Kyrgyzstan, the European Union supports the Kyrgyz Government in its progress towards democracy, the rule of law, sustainable socio-economic development, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We use this opportunity to express our concerns regarding the violent incidents on the Tajik - Kyrgyz border in May and January 2020 and we appeal on both parties for a peaceful resolution of the issue.

Finally, we call on Kyrgyz authorities to work on a solution for the exemption or reimbursement of taxes collected with the local staff, according to financial commitments with the OSCE.

As this is Ambassador Pierre von Arx last presentation at Permanent Council, we would like to thank him for his dedicated and successful work as Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek. We also thank Director Wolters for his dedicated work and wish him success throughout the year.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.