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EU statement on the possible referendum on the term of office of the President of Kazakhstan

Recalling our statement on 13 January in the Permanent Council, the EU regrets that the Parliament of Kazakhstan decided, on 14 January, to adopt constitutional amendments opening the way for a referendum on an extension of the Kazakh President's term of office until 2020 without elections, overturning President Nazarbayev's previous decision to reject this proposal.

The EU notes the fact that President Nazarbayev has referred the proposal to the Constitutional Council for review. The EU strongly hopes that this review will result in the rejection of the initiative, as it would be in contradiction with Kazakhstan's commitment to democracy and good governance. The EU is of the opinion that referenda can be a valuable instrument of democratic governance. However, they are no substitute for regular elections that provide voters with a choice of candidates. The EU once again recalls that all OSCE participating States have agreed that the will of the people, freely and fairly expressed through periodic and genuine elections, is the basis of the authority and legitimacy of all government.

The EU fully agrees with the assessment by the director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ambassador Lenarčič, in his press release of 14 January, that the proposed extension of the current President's

term of office to 2020 would run counter to some of the most fundamental OSCE commitments and other international standards and obligations. As he has pointed out, these commitments were reaffirmed by the President of Kazakhstan and the Heads of State and Government of the other participating States in the Astana Commemorative Declaration just last month.

Following Kazakhstan's recent successful OSCE Chairmanship and in view of its continuing role in the OSCE Troika, the EU urges Kazakhstan to continue to strive for regular, free and fair elections in line with its current constitution and OSCE commitments.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, ICELAND and MONTENEGRO, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area NORWAY, as well as SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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

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