



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1044 Vienna, 12 March 2015

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#### **EU statement on Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and the Rule of Law in Tajikistan**

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The European Union is becoming increasingly alarmed by the reduced space available for peaceful alternative political views to be publicly expressed in Tajikistan. We fear that the current tendency to restrict open debate, including through the blocking of websites, risks driving alternative views underground, with the risk that those denied a legitimate political outlet for their opinions turn to more radical or extreme solutions. Several events have occurred recently that raise questions and concerns.

The ODIHR preliminary conclusions noted that the March Parliamentary elections took place in a restricted political space. In that context, it is striking that the Islamic Revival Party, Central Asia's only legal Islamic party, no longer has a voice in Parliament.

We strongly condemn the killing of opposition politician and founder of Group 24, Mr Umarili Quvvatov, in Istanbul on 5 March and offer our sincere condolences to his family and friends. We are confident that the Turkish authorities will conduct a full and transparent investigation, and bring the culprits to justice.

The European Union is concerned that the detention and conviction of opposition figures in Tajikistan, such as former Minister of Industry Zaid Saidov, may be politically motivated.

We welcome the fact that the sentence for bribery and fraud that was handed down to human rights lawyer and Social Democratic Party Deputy Director, Mr Sukhrat Kudratov, has been reduced on appeal. However we continue to question the motivation for his prosecution, and the timing and circumstances of his initial arrest.

We fear that the example of Mr Kudratov's prosecution may prove detrimental to the freedom and impartiality of Tajikistan's legal profession.

We welcome the statement made by the Tajik delegation at the Permanent Council last week concerning the government's intention to continue to work with ODIHR in the future. We urge the Tajik authorities to fully respect their OSCE and UN commitments with regard to freedom of expression, freedom of association and the rule of law.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania 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.