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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 851
Vienna, 17 February 2011**

EU statement on media freedom in Tajikistan

The European Union strongly condemns the brutal attack carried out on 7 February on Mr Hikmatullo Saifullozoda, a leading figure in the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, the IRPT, and editor-in-chief of its newspaper, Najot. We wish him a full and speedy recovery.

We commend the OSCE Office in Tajikistan for its timely and factual Spot Report of 8 February and its subsequent press statement of 11 February condemning the attack. We urge the authorities in Tajikistan to conduct a thorough investigation into this attack and to make every effort to apprehend and prosecute those responsible.

We commend the leadership of the IRPT for the responsible manner in which it has responded to an attack on one of its leading figures. In particular, we welcome the IRPT's public call for dialogue and mutual understanding.

The EU also wishes to reiterate its broader concerns about the media freedom situation in Tajikistan. We are alarmed by the number of libel lawsuits being brought by public officials and public agencies against newspapers. Substantial and disproportionate damages to the plaintiffs could bring about the closure of several newspapers and threaten media pluralism in Tajikistan. We urge the government to co-operate with the Representative on Freedom of the Media to

address this and a number of other issues she has raised with them and to draw on the expertise and knowledge of her Office, and of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, in a renewed attempt to fulfil its OSCE commitments on media freedom.

The EU supports the efforts of the government of Tajikistan to ensure the security and stability of the country, and we recognise the considerable challenge this presents. At the same time, we stress the need for the Tajik authorities to conduct their activities in accordance with OSCE commitments, not least in respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms - especially the freedom of expression and the freedom of religion - as well as the rule of law.

This brutal attack underlines once again the growing threat to the safety of journalists across the OSCE region. Assaults on journalists undermine the basic human right of freedom of expression and have a chilling effect on free and independent media. We very much welcome the Chairmanship's intention to make this issue a priority this year and to organise a conference on this topic in Vilnius in June.

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

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

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