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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 857
Vienna, 7 April 2011**

EU statement on presidential elections in Kazakhstan

The EU thanks the delegation of Kazakhstan for providing the Permanent Council with continuous information in the run-up to the early Presidential elections on 3 April, as well as the authorities for inviting international observers without restrictions.

Recalling the statement of High Representative Catherine Ashton of 5 April, the EU takes note of the preliminary findings and conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission of the ODIHR and the OSCE PA. We commend the work of the ODIHR and the OSCE PA; their methodology, thoroughness and long experience ensure an objective assessment of the election process.

The EU notes that, according to their findings, the elections were technically well administered. However, these elections revealed similar shortcomings as those observed in previous elections. The EU is particularly concerned by restrictions in the areas of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media freedom. These both hamper the holding of genuine democratic elections and the establishment of a political culture that would enable civil society and political opposition to be heard in decision-making processes between elections.

The holding of early elections, along with changes to the legal framework adopted without comprehensive public debate, made it more difficult for

opposition candidates to participate effectively. Regrettably, this contributed to the elections taking place in a non-competitive environment. According to the findings, though the media provided more equality in covering candidates in news programmes than in earlier elections, analytical reporting on election-related issues was restricted and the incumbent received additional positive coverage in his official role. Overall, the media operate in a restrictive environment which induces self-censorship. We are also concerned about serious irregularities noted on election day and about the reported lack of trust in the impartiality of the election administration.

In conclusion, the EU agrees that these elections demonstrated a need for reforms in order to allow for genuine democratic elections. We call on the Kazakhstani authorities to undertake these reforms in due time before the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for 2012, including in the areas of free media, political party registration, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. Such reforms would demonstrate Kazakhstan's will to live up to the OSCE commitments as reaffirmed during the Summit in Astana last December. We remain committed to supporting Kazakhstan in this respect and hope that Kazakhstan will work with ODIHR and other OSCE bodies, including the Centre in Astana, to remedy identified deficiencies.

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 NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, 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.