



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 901 Vienna, 09 February 2012

EU statement on the sentence of the Uzbek editor Muhammad Bekjanov

The EU is deeply concerned by the additional five year sentence which Muhammad Bekjanov, the former editor of the newspaper Erk, received only days before he was due to be released after his imprisonment in 1999. Reports suggest that the additional sentence was based upon doubtful new charges. Taking into account the reasons for Mr. Bekjanov's imprisonment almost thirteen years ago, the circumstances suggest that his new sentence is politically motivated.

Furthermore, we are seriously concerned by the reports, and by Mr Bekjanov's own testimony, that during his imprisonment he was tortured and beaten. We note that Mr Bekjanov is held in a high-security penal colony for individuals convicted of serious crimes and suffers from tuberculosis. We regret the lack of transparency and willingness of the Uzbek authorities to provide updated information on Mr Bekjanov's health condition.

We call on the Uzbek authorities to guarantee Mr Bekjanov's right to a fair trial in full compliance with Uzbekistan's national legislation and with international legal standards, commitments and obligations during the expected hearing before the appeal court.

In this regard, we would like to remind the Permanent Council that the European Union likewise follows the case of Yusuf Ruzimuradov, Bekjanov's colleague at the newspaper Erk, who was also sentenced in 1999 on similar charges for a 15-year prison term.

The EU will continue to follow closely the cases of Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov and calls on Uzbekistan to release those detained and convicted on political grounds.

The acceding country CROATIA*, the candidate countries THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates 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 EFTA and the European Economic Area.