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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 25, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Yrjölä to the Permanent Council, and we thank her for her report.

We look forward to reaching consensus soon on a new mandate for the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. We regret that the activities of the Office have been interrupted. However, we look forward to the Office once again working at full capacity to support Tajikistan in addressing issues across all three OSCE dimensions.

We support the Office's work concerning democratization, rule of law, and human rights, which are integral parts of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. We also support activities to counter violent extremism, corruption, and human trafficking, as well as to strengthen border management and policing. Countering violent extremism and radicalization to violence should remain a priority, with a cross-dimensional approach that respects human rights while addressing factors that can make people more vulnerable to recruitment as foreign terrorist fighters. We regret that Tajikistan was unable to attend the Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Conference held in Vienna on May 23-24.

The United States strongly supports the Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe, and looks forward to discussing its continuing evolution. We believe that the BMSC should be included in the OSCE unified budget in order to put it on more stable and predictable financial footing. The recent developments concerning reaching consensus on the extension of the mandate of the Office in Tajikistan show clearly that the BMSC is at risk as long as it remains an extra-budgetary project under the Office.

We support the Office in Tajikistan's work on police reform, and appreciate its community policing program. Community policing continues to be an effective security assistance program, supporting stability in the region. We also appreciate the proposed follow-on project to the patrol, programming, and leadership program, and look forward to further details on this initiative.

The United States remains concerned about recent developments in Tajikistan, particularly diminishing political and media freedoms, and the targeting of defense lawyers. We are concerned about the recent extension of the sentence of defense lawyer Burzurgmehr Yorov, and the increased pressure on journalists working for non-governmental media outlets.

The United States remains concerned by government practices that limit the ability of individuals to freely exercise their human right to freedom of religion or belief, including undue restrictions on women and children attending religious services. We are also concerned that space for civil society has been shrinking in Tajikistan, as members of NGOs and the organizations themselves face increasing scrutiny by and pressure from the government under legislation that facilitates government interference in their activities.

The United States calls upon Tajikistan to uphold its international human rights obligations and its OSCE and other international commitments.

Ambassador Yrjölä, we thank you again for your report, and for all the work you and your team undertake to assist Tajikistan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.