



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1154
Vienna, 13 July 2017**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the
OSCE Programme Office in Astana, H.E. Ambassador
György Szabó**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Szabó back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

The European Union shares good cooperation with Kazakhstan based on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, elements of which are being provisionally applied since 1 May 2016. This new generation of agreement represents a significant step forward in EU-Kazakhstan relations. We also welcome Kazakhstan's active involvement in the High Level EU-Central Asia Security Dialogue, as part of the regional political dialogue.

The EU welcomes the continued OSCE presence in Kazakhstan. We support the Programme Office's assistance to the host country's extensive reform goals across all three dimensions in line with OSCE principles and commitments. We encourage the authorities to develop its cooperation with the OSCE to its full potential, and in addition encourage the Programme Office to make full use of its mandate.

We welcome that the Programme Office has continued its longstanding cooperation with the host country and international partners as well as constantly engaging civil society, media, academia, and business community in its activities. We welcome the involvement of youth in addressing regional security challenges and threats and in particular, the Office's active support of the Central Asian Youth Network, as well as assisting in the organization of the regional Radicalization Workshop in Almaty on 11-13 May, which is a priority initiative of the OSCE Chairmanship. We encourage the Programme Office to develop further its efforts to engage civil society.

In the Politico-military Dimension, we welcome that capacity building in border security issues, including in a regional context, remains a priority and appreciate the Office's continued cooperation with the EU Border Management in Central Asia Programme (BOMCA). We positively assess its activities aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism while promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. We also appreciate that the Office organised activities related to managing public assemblies, as well as to democratic policing.

We welcome the Programme Office's continued work to promote good governance, with a view to combating corruption, money laundering, as well as terrorism financing. We positively assess the Programme's Office support to the preparation and organisation of this year's Second Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum in Astana on 14-16 June, as well as to Expo 2017. In this vein, we further commend the Office's advocacy for water management in a transboundary context and environmental education.

We place particular emphasis on the work in the human dimension. We remain concerned about increasingly severe restrictions of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as attempts by the authorities to control civil society. We recall our concerns voiced in the Permanent Council on 26 January 2017 (on the cases of Maks Bokayev and Talgat Ayanov) regarding freedom of association and freedom of the media.

We commend the Programme Office for having continued to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and the strengthening of democratic institutions. We welcome the Office's facilitation of the roundtable discussion on the draft law regarding constitutional changes as the main high level forum between government and civil society in February this year.

We value the Programme Office's continued work with the host authorities, civil society and media on issues related to freedom of expression and of the media, freedom of religion or belief, and non-discrimination. We welcome activity on criminal justice, judicial and penitentiary and judiciary reform. We value the Office's work on combating domestic violence and promoting gender equality.

We appreciate the close cooperation of the Office with OSCE autonomous institutions as well as other OSCE field operations in Central Asia. We encourage the Office to continue developing and expanding these partnerships further.

We continue to underline that for all field operations, effective evaluation is essential in ensuring the efficient use of resources, and that activities remain result-oriented. We encourage field operations to focus their reporting at outcome level, on results and follow-up, and to ensure continuous evaluation. We would be grateful if Ambassador Szabó could highlight some of the key impacts of the Office's work during this reporting period, as well as providing information on what is planned by way of evaluation during the next year. We would also appreciate to hear more about the Office's efforts to mainstream gender into its programmes and projects.

In conclusion, we thank Ambassador Szabó for his report and wish him and his staff well for their work throughout the year.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* 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, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.