



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1268 Vienna, 21 May 2020

#### **EU Statement in response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, Ambassador Valeriu Chiveri**

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Valeriu Chiveri to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

We attach great importance to the work of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe and appreciate the valuable cooperation between the OSCE Office and the EU Delegation to Tajikistan.

We strongly support the ongoing use of the Partnership Platform, a collaborative, multi stakeholder process to set the Programme Office's forward agenda on a strategic level, and review progress. This Platform is essential for both successful project implementation and effective programme planning. We hope that the planned 2020 Partnership meeting will happen despite the current circumstances. The Programme Office's access to and interaction with civil society should be unhindered, and such cooperation with the Programme Office and structures should have no detrimental consequences for civil society organisations.

We welcome the Programme Office's activity across all three OSCE dimensions and appreciate the mainstreaming of human rights and gender throughout its activities.

We welcome the Office's community-based approach to tackle VERLT and the approach to ensure that the fight against VERLT is not at the expense of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We welcome the successful start of the EU-supported initiative to enhance the capacity of Tajik Border Troops and of the Committee on Emergency Situations and Civil Defence to address security-related threats stemming from the southern border with Afghanistan. We commend the Office for their flexibility in the implementation of the activities despite of the current pandemic.

We particularly welcome the Office's anti-corruption work in the Second Dimension. The EU, within the framework of the OSCE and through its bilateral co-operation programmes, stands ready to support the authorities of Tajikistan to further reinforce public trust in institutions, which can contribute to more investment and prosperity.

We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Tajikistan and in this context we stress the importance of the Office's activities in the Human Dimension and welcome its achievements. We commend the Programme Office for signing a joint plan of action with the Main Prison Department focused on legislative improvement, staff training and development of a prisoner rehabilitation programme. As we recollect the deadly prison riots from previous years, we call on the Tajik government to ensure that prison conditions are in line with OSCE commitments. We reiterate the importance of the Programme Office's work on prevention of torture and other forms of ill-treatment and we call again on Tajikistan to ratify the Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to conduct prison visits.

We welcome the activities focused on empowering women and strengthening their role in public and political life, as well as on combating domestic violence and in this context we praise the support provided to Women's Resource Centres. We welcome that the Office continues to give this work priority and adapt assistance by online means given the existing COVID-19 restrictions.

We also consider work on freedom of the media and freedom of expression to be a priority. We call on authorities to implement all OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom in full and to make sure that critical voices can be heard and that journalists and media actors can perform their work, safely, independently and without undue interference and influence. In this regard, we express our deep concern with the physical assault of Abdullo Gurati, a journalist documenting the health crisis.

On this occasion, we draw attention to the recent EU Strategy on Central Asia focusing on promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation in Central Asia. The

implementation of this strategy provides a valuable opportunity for the EU and Central Asia to forge a strong and durable partnership. The promotion and protection of rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, civil society, the rights of women and sustainable development, good governance, among others, must remain at the core of these relations. Working collaboratively with the OSCE and the field missions, including the Programme Office in Dushanbe, is an important component of the Strategy and we look forward to enhancing further our cooperation.

In April, the EU announced a global plan for a robust and targeted response to support partner countries' efforts in tackling the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to the existing external action resources, the EU will provide €48 million for Tajikistan for prevention and preparedness to face a possible health crisis and resulting humanitarian needs, strengthening health, water and sanitation systems and mitigating the socioeconomic impact.

We value the work of the Border Management Staff College (BMSC). It continues to play a key role in building capacity of the border-related agencies of Tajikistan, neighbouring countries and beyond. We therefore repeat our call for the BMSC to be funded from the Unified Budget, at least partially, to provide much-needed financial stability and avoid time-consuming fundraising.

We use this opportunity to express our concerns regarding the recent violent incidents on the Tajik - Kyrgyz border in January and in the beginning of May and we appeal on both parties for a peaceful resolution of the issue. We hope the deepening relations between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan will bring security and economic benefits to the people in all three countries.

Finally, we once again thank Ambassador Chiveri for his work and wish him and his team success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.