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## **EU statement in response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Hamrokhon Zarifi**

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The European Union welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Hamrokhon Zarifi, to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address.

The European Union continues to pursue closer relations with Tajikistan. The EU, within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, is assisting the Tajik Government in its structural reform process, as well as enhancing civil society capacity, working in partnership with local and international NGOs. In the first meeting of the EU-Tajikistan Cooperation Council in December both parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen relations in a number of areas and reviewed recent reforms in Tajikistan.

The EU welcomes the improvement in the security situation in Tajikistan, following a series of incidents that took place in the second half of last year. We support the Government's efforts to ensure the security and stability of the country, and recognise the considerable challenge this presents. At the same time, we remind the Tajik authorities of the need to conduct their activities in accordance with their OSCE commitments, not least in respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion, and the rule of law.

We encourage the Tajik authorities to continue to work with the OSCE Office to combat violent extremism and radicalisation, to implement the National Border Strategy and to improve cross border co-operation with its neighbours, including in respect of demining. Co-operation between the EU and Tajikistan on all these issues remains productive. We attach particular importance to the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe and hope that problems regarding its premises can soon be resolved.

The EU would also like to thank the Government of Tajikistan for the work it has been doing with the Afghan authorities, under the auspices of the OSCE, notably with regard to border management training.

We welcome the Government of Tajikistan's willingness to draw upon OSCE advice and assistance to address transboundary issues such as energy security, water management and the transportation of goods. This can help boost regional co-operation and stability. We see promoting good governance and combating corruption as other key priorities for Tajikistan in the environmental and economic field.

The EU continues to have concerns about Tajikistan's progress in meeting its human dimension commitments.

- ODIHR's assessment of the parliamentary elections held in February 2010 revealed many shortcomings. We encourage the Government of Tajikistan to work with the ODIHR to implement its recommendations.
- A series of libel lawsuits against media organisations has cast doubt on Tajikistan's determination to develop a pluralistic, free and independent media. The recent violent attack on the editor of an opposition newspaper has also caused concern. We encourage the Tajik authorities to draw on the considerable expertise of the

Representative on Freedom of the Media to help reverse this negative trend.

- Recent events also suggest that Tajikistan needs to do more to strengthen the rule of law and to protect human rights. We encourage Tajikistan to implement criminal justice and police reform, including improving detention facilities and the conditions for detainees, as well as to support and strengthen the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman and to do more to promote human rights awareness.

The EU would also like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan for the assistance it has provided the host country to implement OSCE principles and commitments. The constructive working relationship between the Government of Tajikistan and the Office has laid solid foundations for effective OSCE programme activity across the country.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we would like once again to thank Foreign Minister Zarifi for addressing the Permanent Council today. We wish him and his country well as they move along the path of economic and democratic reform.

The candidate countries TURKEY, 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, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA 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.