

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1004
Vienna, 12 June 2014**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Head of the
OSCE Centre in Astana, H.E. Ambassador Natalia Zarudna**

The EU and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Zarudna back to the Permanent Council and thank her for her comprehensive report.

The EU appreciates the Centre's assistance to the host country's efforts in addressing internal and external threats to security, in further developing democratic governance in Kazakhstan, and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We support the Centre's assistance to the host country's reform and capacity-building efforts in all three dimensions, in compliance with OSCE principles and commitments.

Kazakhstan is facing future challenges in social, economic and political developments as mentioned in the report. The EU considers enlarged public participation, access to information and transparency to be key in order to maintain a prosperous and stable path of growth. Therefore, the EU supports a close and increasing co-operation between the OSCE field office and all relevant parts of the host country's Government, as well as with civil society, academia, national and international institutions in Kazakhstan, and suggests considering the successful Task Force model.

The EU acknowledges the Centre's support for the host country's regional initiatives related to the green economy, water and energy security and transnational threats. We appreciate continued activities on TNTs, in particular with regard to border security and the promotion of democratic policing principles.

We understand the view that violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism is a potentially destabilizing factor for Kazakhstan and more widely. However, we are concerned about proposed restrictions in national legislation on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, religion or belief, of association and access to information. We welcome the work of the Centre to follow and help promote reform in these areas and encourage Kazakhstan to make use of the OSCE's expertise. We call upon the Kazakh authorities not to impede but to facilitate the free flow of information and, by that, to ensure transparency and accountability in public institutions and by public officials. We welcome recent reform efforts by the Kazakh authorities in the field of torture prevention and penitentiary reform.

Since Kazakhstan's reform agenda in many areas coincides with OSCE priorities in the region, the EU is concerned about the recent reflections on transforming the OSCE Centre in Astana into a Programme Office. The OSCE field missions continue to make an important contribution to the work of the OSCE in all three dimensions; they have provided and continue to provide valuable assistance to participating States and valuable cooperation with civil society. We note wider discussions currently underway on the work of field operations, including in the Helsinki + 40 process. We would therefore suggest to revert back to the question of the possible changes to the mandate of the OSCE Centre in Astana in light of these discussions. We also see value in a wider consultative process in Kazakhstan, involving different parts of the government and civil society.

We underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to ensure efficient use of resources and aids the development of best practices and of lesson learning. We thank you for highlighting some of the key impacts made by the Centre in Astana through its programmatic work in this reporting period.

The EU will continue to support the activities of the Centre in Astana and the engagements of Ambassador Zarudna and her team. We very much appreciate

their ongoing efforts in cooperating with the Kazakh authorities and civil society, and we wish her and her team every success in their valuable contribution to the reform process.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.