



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 956
Vienna, 13 June 2013**

**EU statement in reply to the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in
Uzbekistan, H.E. Ambassador György Szabó**

The EU and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Szabó to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report on the activities of the Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan.

The EU supports the Project Co-ordinator's close dialogue with the Uzbek government and other relevant stakeholders on project activities across all three dimensions, designed to assist Uzbekistan in meeting its OSCE commitments and pursuing its reform and democratisation agenda. We particularly welcome the agreement reached following the visit of OSCE Secretary General, H.E. Lamberto Zannier to Uzbekistan in January this year, to increase the number of local staff positions by two new project officers. This should help to intensify the Project Co-ordinator's outreach activities and their efficiency. We also appreciate an agreement reached between the Project Co-ordinator and the Government of Uzbekistan in July 2012 to gradually adjust the project agreeing mechanism to the overall programme planning cycle of the OSCE.

We commend the Project Co-ordinator's active contribution to the enhancement of co-operation between Uzbekistan and various OSCE Institutions and executive structures. We welcome the fact that for the first time this year, representatives from Uzbekistan took part in the ODIHR trainings for long-term and short-term election observers. In view of the forthcoming elections in Uzbekistan in 2014 and 2015, we underline the need for Uzbekistan to increase interaction with the ODIHR and other OSCE Institutions in order to use their expertise and recommendations and to strengthen institutional capacity of the Central Election Commission and other relevant bodies.

The EU attaches great importance to the Project Co-ordinator's efforts to enhance civil society development and strengthen democratic institutions. We encourage

him to broaden the scope of partners to civil society in his project activities. Participation of non-governmental and media representatives in OSCE events, international trainings and study tours should be further encouraged and facilitated. We welcome the new focus on activities in the regions, contributing to the formation of civil society.

The EU supports the Project Co-ordinator's assistance to Uzbekistan in ensuring security and stability, including in the fight against terrorism, violent extremism, illegal drug trafficking, as well as in border management and disaster preparedness. In addressing transnational threats and challenges, we underline the importance of regional co-operation and co-ordination with relevant international actors, also with regard to the post-2014 developments in Afghanistan. We would welcome greater participation from Uzbekistan at OSCE events dedicated to confidence building.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension, we particularly appreciate activities pertaining to good governance and the rule of law, such as projects on combating money laundering and financing of terrorism and the fight against corruption.

In the Human Dimension, the EU continues to support the Project Co-ordinator's focus on human rights education and practical training for the police and judiciary, as well as assistance to the Ombudsperson Institution and its co-operation with the civil society and NGOs. We also attach great importance to efforts to enhance media freedom and to strengthen capacity building of state information services, aimed at improving transparency and their relations with the media. With regard to cross-dimensional issues, we highly value the Project Co-ordinator's assistance in combating human trafficking.

The EU remains concerned about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan and its non-compliance with several OSCE Human Dimension commitments, notably in regard to freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Law enforcement officers prevent peaceful assembly of citizens; many news, opposition and human rights websites are blocked; barriers to the registration of human rights NGOs and independent political parties remain and human rights defenders and independent journalists continue to report

harassment from the security services. Reports surface regularly of the torture and mistreatment of detainees. We consider work in these and other areas related to human rights and fundamental freedoms particularly relevant in Uzbekistan.

The EU stands ready to continue its co-operation with the Government of Uzbekistan in a comprehensive way. We reiterate the importance we attach to the EU – Uzbek dialogue in the various existing formats.

We would like to take this opportunity to call on Uzbekistan to pay its contribution, and its arrears, to the OSCE's Unified Budget. We would also ask Uzbekistan to reconsider the issue of taxation of local staff salaries in the Project Co-ordinator's Office.

In conclusion, the EU would like to thank Ambassador Szabó and his team for their dedicated work and wish them success in their future activities.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, 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 countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, 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.