



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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## **Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**Permanent Council No. 712  
8 May 2008**

### **EU statement in response to the report by the Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador Istvan Venczel**

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Venczel for his first appearance in the Permanent Council since taking up his functions as Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan. We would like to thank the Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan for his informative written and oral reports and his clear analysis of achievements and possible improvements in his cooperation with his host country.

In the Foreign Ministers' Council's conclusions of 29 April, the EU welcomed the progress achieved in Uzbekistan in recent months in the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law, notably the abolition of the death penalty, the introduction of habeas corpus and the ratification of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. We look forward to the effective implementation of these measures and stand ready to assist Uzbekistan in that regard. The EU remains willing to strengthen cooperation with Uzbekistan in all priority areas outlined in the EU Strategy for Central Asia.

The EU welcomes the release by the Uzbek authorities of four human rights defenders in February 2008, namely Saidjahon Zainabitdinov, Ikhtior Khamraev, Ulugbek Kattabaev and Bobomurod Mavlanov, and the cancellation of the probation period of two other human rights defenders, Gulbahor Turaeva and Umida Niazova, who were released from prison last year.

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The EU is also pleased that the Uzbek government has reached an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the resumption of visits by the ICRC to prisons in Uzbekistan. The EU will pay close attention to the effective implementation of this agreement.

The EU looks forward to continuing comprehensive and results-oriented dialogue with the Uzbek authorities and in that context welcomes the Uzbek agreement to conduct a second round of the EU-Uzbekistan Human Rights dialogue in May/June this year. The EU also looks forward to the holding of an EU seminar on media freedom in Uzbekistan and encourages the Uzbek authorities to take further steps to guarantee the freedom of expression and to allow further liberalisation of mass media in Uzbekistan.

Nevertheless, the EU remains seriously concerned about the situation of human rights and the rule of law in a number of areas in Uzbekistan and urges the authorities to fully implement their international obligations in that regard. In particular, the EU calls on the Uzbek authorities to take the following steps, as requested earlier:

- a. to ensure the early release of the imprisoned human rights defenders and to cease harassment of human rights defenders;
- b. to finalise without delay the accreditation of the new Country Director of Human Rights Watch and to allow the unhindered operation of that organisation;
- c. to cooperate fully and effectively with the UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture and on Freedom of the Media; and
- d. to revoke restrictions on the registration and operation of NGOs in Uzbekistan.

Regarding the co-operation between the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan and the host country, the EU welcomes the increased agreement rate for projects as proof

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of growing support for the activities of the Project Coordinator on the part of the Uzbek government. We appreciate that the Uzbek side has proven to be a helpful and constructive partner in the implementation of projects.

However, we remain concerned that the project approval process in general still seems too long and complicated. We therefore encourage the Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan to continue his efforts to strengthen further confidence and the cooperation between his office and his host country.

The EU welcomes the Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan's active role in focussing attention on the OSCE's possible engagement with Afghanistan and encourages the Project Coordinator to continue his successful project activities in the first dimension, including his long-term project of assistance for the Uzbek Police Academy. We encourage the Project Coordinator to further build on his initiatives to increase public awareness for the role of political parties and to strengthen the capacity of socio-political organisations. We were pleased to hear about the successful international conference held recently on security issues in Central Asia and Afghanistan. We are also looking forward to the forthcoming conference regarding the 2009 parliamentary elections.

The EU welcomes the fact that the Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan's work in the second dimension includes various activities that contribute to strengthening the political and legal framework for economic activities such as, for example, projects helping to counter tax evasion and money laundering in the banking and commercial sector or providing assistance to the business community and to the arbitration courts to improve the quality of settling business disputes. We would like to encourage the Project Coordinator to continue to promote aspects of good governance in his activities. We also welcome the work done by the Project Coordinator with regard to environmental issues, notably in the field of water

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management, on which a successful conference on the transfer of technology was held in October 2007. The EU supports the Project Coordinator's activities aiming at preventing tensions and reducing existing and potential risks in the environmental sphere, and welcomes the coordination with other international stakeholders on these issues.

The EU would welcome a further extension of the Project Coordinator's activities in the third dimension. We therefore encourage the Project Coordinator and the Government of Uzbekistan to improve their cooperation on projects regarding human rights, democratisation and the rule of law, including contributions from the ODIHR. In particular, we take note with interest of the action programme dedicated to the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as announced by the President of Uzbekistan and we call on the Uzbek authorities to use the expertise of the Project Coordinator's Office in the implementation of this action programme. However, we regret that some capacity-building projects regarding key human rights activities were not or only partially approved and that projects concerning civil society or the media were often rejected. We therefore encourage the Uzbek government to decide more favourably on such projects in the future.

The EU welcomes the fact that in December 2007 for the first time a presidential election in Uzbekistan was observed by the OSCE/ODIHR. However, we are concerned that, according to the ODIHR's recently published final report, many of its earlier relevant recommendations have not yet been implemented. We therefore encourage the Uzbek Government to implement fully the ODIHR's recommendations aiming at improving the electoral framework.

The EU wishes Ambassador Venczel and his staff much success for their future activities in cooperation with Uzbekistan.

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The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Norway, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

\* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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