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EU Statement on Media Freedom in Uzbekistan

The European Union recalls its statement delivered at the Permanent Council on 19 June on the situation with regard to freedom of the media in Uzbekistan, in particular the arrest on 7 June on drug charges of the journalist Mr Salidzhon Abdurakhmonov. Like the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the EU cannot but express concern that despite the lack of reliable evidence, Mr Abdurakhmonov was convicted on 10 October of possession of narcotics with intent to distribute and sentenced to ten year's imprisonment.

The EU is therefore concerned that the principles of fair trial were not guaranteed to Mr. Abdurakhmanov by the first instance court and hopes that a thorough review of his case will occur at appeal level. In this regard, the EU considers it relevant that, as reported by Mr Haraszti, Mr Abdurakhmanov has no previous involvement in any similar offence, that a blood test on him discovered no traces of drugs and that his fingerprints were not found on the packages containing the drugs and therefore there was no reliable evidence which would implicate him in the use or sale of narcotics.

Under these circumstances, the conviction and sentencing of Mr Abdurakhmanov challenges the credibility of Uzbekistan to comply with its OSCE commitments on freedom of the media and rule of law. The EU would

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like to recall that the Uzbek authorities renewed their commitments to respect the norms, standards and practises relating to freedom of the media at a joint EU-Uzbek seminar on media liberalisation held in Tashkent on 2nd and 3rd October.

The EU avails itself of this opportunity to reiterate the importance it attaches to freedom of expression and opinion and their corollary, as expressed in our statement of the 19th of June.

La Turquie, la Croatie* et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine*, pays candidats ; l'Albanie, la Bosnie - Herzégovine, le Monténégro et la Serbie, pays du processus de stabilisation et d'association et candidats potentiels ; l'Islande et la Norvège, pays de l'Association Européenne de libre-échange et membres de l'Espace économique européen ; ainsi que la République de Moldavie et la Géorgie se rallient à cette déclaration.

*La Croatie et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine continuent à participer au processus de stabilisation et d'association.

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