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**EUROPEAN UNION**

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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 909  
Vienna, 26 April 2012**

## **EU statement on the sentence of journalist Elena Bondar in Uzbekistan**

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The EU has learned with concern that Elena Bondar, an independent journalist who reports on various social issues in Uzbekistan, was sentenced in first instance to a heavy fine on 6 April 2012 by the Yunusabadsky district court of Tashkent on charges of “Manufacture, possession or distribution of materials that promote national, racial, ethnic or religious hatred” under Article 184-3 of the Administrative Code of Uzbekistan.

We are concerned that during the trial several procedural violations have been reported which has prompted us to question whether Elena Bondar’s right to a fair trial was respected. According to reports, Elena Bondar did not receive a written summons to attend the court hearing and the accusation and sentence was based on a doubtful testimony of only one witness.

We understand that the case of Elena Bondar is going to be taken to a court of higher instance. We call on the Uzbek authorities to ensure Elena Bondar’s right to a fair trial fully consistent with Uzbekistan’s commitments to international standards on the rule of law. We will continue to closely monitor developments related to the appeal process.

On a more general note we would like to use this opportunity to reiterate our request to Uzbekistan to guarantee that journalists and human rights defenders are able to carry out their work independently without fear and free of any unlawful restrictions or interference from governmental entities in accordance with Uzbekistan's international human rights commitments. We reiterate our call on the Uzbek authorities to release those arbitrarily detained and convicted for exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression.

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 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, 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.