



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1135 Vienna, 2 March 2017

EU Statement on the release of the former Uzbek chief editor of the opposition newspaper Erk Mr Muhammad Bekjanov

The European Union would like to recall its statements in the Permanent Council on 9 February 2012 and 29 March 2012 regarding the sentence of the former Uzbek chief editor of the opposition newspaper Erk Mr Muhammad Bekjanov.

The EU notes the release of Mr Bekjanov on 22 February 2017 at the end of his prolonged prison sentence of 18 years in total. We also note the statement of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović of the same date who welcomed the release of Mr Bekjanov as a positive step. The EU is pleased that Mr. Bekjanov has been reunited with his family at last, and we hope that he will be able to continue his work.

The EU also welcomes the release of Mr Djamshid Karimov, a journalist from Djizak, who had been confined almost continuously to a psychiatric institution in Samarkand since 2006. Mr Karimov was released yesterday.

We encourage the Uzbek authorities to release all members of the media who remain in prison or in psychiatric institutions, including Yusuf Ruzimuradov, Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov and Dilmurod Saiid.

The release of Mr Bekjanov as well as the release of Mr Rustam Usmanov a few days earlier were recognized by the EU during the meeting of the EU - Uzbekistan Cooperation Committee and Trade Sub-Committee, which took place on 22 February 2017 in Tashkent. At the same meeting the EU also encouraged the release of further prisoners of conscience following individual appeals.

Uzbekistan is a key partner country of the European Union in Central Asia. The EU stands ready to step up its current engagement with Uzbekistan in a comprehensive

way, including with regard to the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments. We encourage Uzbek authorities to make use of the expertise and recommendations of the OSCE autonomous institutions. In this context we positively note the intention of the Government of Uzbekistan to engage more with ODIHR and RFoM.

The EU once again welcomes the significant reforms in Uzbekistan that were announced last year in the run-up to the presidential elections, in the new development strategy 2017-2021 and in several presidential statements and decrees, and encourages their implementation. These reforms would strengthen Uzbekistan's democratic governance and economic and social development.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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