



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1475 Vienna, 23 May 2024

EU Statement on the Report by the Head of the Programme Office in Bishkek and the Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Head of the Programme Office in Bishkek, Ambassador Alexey Rogov, and the newly appointed Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Dr. Kate Walker to the Permanent Council and thanks them both for their comprehensive reports.
2. We appreciate the Programme Office's work and achievements in all three OSCE dimensions of security as Kyrgyzstan faces the strains induced by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the negative consequences deriving from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
3. We value the continuous good cooperation between the Programme Office and the host authorities and civil society, including through the Consultative Mechanism and other high-level meetings.
4. The EU particularly commends the Programme Office for advancing women's participation in all aspects of comprehensive security, including assisting the Kyrgyz authorities in implementing gender-related commitments within governmental structures. As part of its efforts to empower young women in Central Asia and enhance their involvement in peace and security processes, the EU is proud to sponsor the Young Women for Peace Initiative for Central Asia, launched in April 2024 in Bishkek by the OSCE Gender Issues Programme, in close cooperation with the Programme Office in Bishkek and the OSCE Academy.

5. Given the lingering sense of insecurity among border communities, following several clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, we commend the continued support of the Programme Office for Kyrgyzstan's efforts to strengthen border security and foster cross-border cooperation with neighbouring participating States. We positively note that, over the reporting period, the Programme Office has facilitated three regional events aimed at confidence-building with the participation of senior leaders and border service officials from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. We also take positive note of Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's efforts to peacefully resolve all outstanding issues surrounding their international border, including via dialogue at the highest political level and regular meetings of their relevant authorities, which have made possible a mutual agreement on around 90 per cent of their shared border. We encourage further efforts in this direction, fostering deeper dialogue and cooperation on demarcation, as well as border and water management.

6. We also thank the Programme Office for its comprehensive work in promoting the rule of law, sustainable economic development and the fight against climate change in Kyrgyzstan. This contributes not only to Kyrgyzstan's socio-economic advancement, but also enhances its potential to participate in the regional cooperation processes, which have growing importance. The EU remains committed to advancing the main priorities of its Strategy on Central Asia and its Global Gateway Initiative, which focus on promoting resilience, prosperity, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and regional cooperation. Kyrgyzstan is an important EU partner in meeting these strategic objectives, and we are grateful for its constructive regional role and its contribution to deepening the engagement between the EU and Central Asia, as evidenced by its hosting of the second High-level Meeting between the Central Asian Heads of State and the President of the European Council in June 2023. We also appreciate the country's active involvement in the first EU-Central Asia Meeting with the participation of the Foreign Ministers of all EU Member States and their Central Asian counterparts, held in October 2023 in Luxembourg. We recall this Meeting's Joint Communiqué reaffirming the shared commitment to uphold the UN Charter and the fundamental principles of international law, on which the enhancement of EU-Central Asia relations is based, and in particular, the respect for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all states, including within the framework of all international and regional fora.

7. The EU remains committed to bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan based on respect for fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democratic standards. These values constitute an integral part of our Generalised Scheme of Preferences and our upcoming Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. In view of this, we continue to closely examine the overall human rights situation in the country, including the deterioration in freedom of the media and freedom of expression. We call on the Kyrgyz authorities to uphold their international human rights obligations and commitments and to protect freedom of expression and the integrity of journalists and media outlets, in order to allow them to carry out their professional activities. The recent adoption of the 'Foreign Representatives' legislation is a further worrying development. In this regard, we recall the concerns expressed by ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci and RFoM Teresa Ribeiro ahead of its adoption. Legislation that restricts civil society organisations' ability to operate freely could have a negative impact on the Kyrgyz society, and we encourage Kyrgyzstan to ensure that it is not applied arbitrarily and does not exceed its scope. We will also continue to encourage Kyrgyzstan to revise the draft law on "Mass Media" in line with recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
8. The EU commends the important work of the OSCE Academy and recognises its positive impact on the region's academic excellence, connectivity, cohesion, and stability. The Academy continues to be a flagship project for the OSCE. With new Bachelor and Master Programmes accredited by the Kyrgyz authorities, including the EU-funded Master of Arts in Human Rights and Sustainability, the Academy is progressing towards becoming a fully-fledged regional centre for higher education and research. We applaud this impressive development, which was initiated by the former director, Dr. Wolters, and look forward to its continuation by the newly appointed Director, Dr. Walker.
9. In conclusion, we reiterate our appreciation for the successful work of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, as well as of the OSCE Academy, and wish both Ambassador Rogov and Dr. Walker and their teams every success in their work.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.