



S. PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF PORTUGAL
R. TO THE OSCE

EU2007.PT
Portugal 2007- Presidency of the European Union

Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

682nd Meeting of the Permanent Council
18th October 2007

Statement of the European Union in response to the address by Ambassador Pryakhin, Head of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Pryakhin to the Permanent Council for the first time in his new capacity as Head of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. We thank him for his presentation today and for the detailed and comprehensive written report covering a rather longer period than usual since the last formal report to the PC in May 2006.

In line with its Central-Asia Strategy, the European Union continues to follow political and economic developments in Tajikistan with great attention, as well as the work of the Centre across all three dimensions. In this respect we encourage the Centre to enhance its reporting on progress by the host country towards meeting its commitments. We are especially pleased to hear of further progress in developing the relationship between the OSCE Centre and the Tajik authorities within the context of the reinvigorated Task Force. The number of high level visits in recent months also attests to the desire on all sides to deepen our engagement in pursuit of our common objectives.

The EU recognises the legitimate aspirations of the Tajik authorities to 'move beyond the phase of post-conflict peace-building and consolidate stability through economic development'. In this respect, the EU

acknowledges the expressions of interest by the authorities in enhanced OSCE engagement in a number of new areas with a regional dimension, including economic development; border management and security; trans-boundary water management; police assistance and counter-terrorism; demining, small arms and light weapons and conventional ammunition; and nuclear waste.

At the same time, we welcome the fact that the host country has also emphasised that new activities in these areas should not be at the expense of necessary work in the human dimension. The EU does not subscribe to the notion of an artificial financial balance between the dimensions – rather we would stress the need to address the specific challenges in each individual area, regardless of the relative budgetary allocation.

In this respect, we also take note of the Ambassador's comments relating to the budgetary proposal for 2008. Without prejudice to the outcome of further discussions on the detail of the proposal in the coming weeks, the EU has gone on record earlier this week in supporting a greater emphasis on the Central Asian region. We recognise that the strategy which has evolved over the last year or so reflects a concerted approach to the long-term challenges faced by the country, which have implications not only for Tajikistan itself but also for the wider region and the OSCE as a whole.

We welcome the commitment of Tajik authorities to maintain an open door policy in foreign relations, as confirmed by President Rakhmon in his annual speech to Parliament in April 2007. Engagement in other regional organisations is a valuable means of addressing both security and economic development issues more effectively. In this context, the OSCE's invitation to observe the recent proceedings of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in Dushanbe, and the Secretary General's address to the CSTO's Council of Foreign Ministers, were welcome evidence of mutual co-operation between different international organisations with common interests.

Further to the Presidential elections in November 2006, and ODIHR's assessment that the elections 'did not fully test democratic electoral practices' and that the 'election process also revealed substantial shortcomings', the EU expresses its strong support for the Centre's activities in promoting the development of political pluralism, notably through bringing together Government and civil society representatives in the Social Partnership Club. The EU also attaches great importance to the Centre's support for the promotion of democratisation, especially in the legal and judicial sector; in penitentiary reform; in freedom of religion; and through human rights education. We are especially interested in further developments towards the establishment of a national human rights institution (i.e.: Ombudsman) and look forward to hearing the results of the working group tasked with providing a draft law to Parliament by December 2007.

The EU has frequently stated its firmly-held belief that a free and active media sector is a fundamental building block in establishing stable and enduring democratic traditions. The EU therefore commends the Centre's work in fostering democratisation of the media in Tajikistan. We look forward to further developments in this area on the back of the forthcoming 9th Central Asia Media Conference.

The Centre's activities under its Gender Awareness and Equality programme address two issues of particular concern to the EU: gender equality and women's rights; and trafficking in human beings. The Centre's work at the national level to introduce gender equality as a principle of state policies, and involvement with NGOs and local communities at the grass-roots, are both essential elements of the OSCE's mission in promoting fulfilment of participating States' commitments. The EU likewise welcomes the Centre's intention to support the host country in building the capacity of state institutions to combat trafficking through implementation of the National Action Plan for 2006-2010.

The EU recognises the difficult situation with regard to border security, and drug smuggling in particular, in the country and the region as a whole. Border management is an issue where all the key actors have a common interest in addressing not only the threats to security but also to sustainable economic and political development. The European Union is therefore fully supportive of efforts to develop a comprehensive approach to border security and management in Tajikistan. Discussions on a range of proposals in this area have been on-going for some time now. We encourage the Tajik authorities to continue working with the OSCE towards the implementation of the proposed border security and management projects.

The EU commends the Centre on its continuing work in the area of small arms and light weapons, as well as mine action. Addressing this legacy of the civil war has economic as well as human consequences. In this respect, we would like to take this opportunity to express once again our sadness at the deaths of two international experts and a Tajik national working in this area earlier this year.

The EU takes note of the Ambassador's reference in his written report to the issue of water management. Along with other environmental questions, this has wider regional implications and the EU supports the Centre's efforts to co-ordinate activities in these areas with Governmental institutions to develop a long term approach through a National Environmental Strategy, for which the Tajik authorities would assume responsibility. In the sphere of economic development, the EU stresses its support for the Centre's work, together with UNDP, in supporting the Government's efforts to combat corruption. The networks of information and resource centres also provide valuable assistance to disadvantaged groups across the country, notably in rural areas.

The EU would like to thank Ambassador Pryakhin once again for his report and looks forward to further discussion in the context of the 2008 Budget negotiations.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and 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.