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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1231st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

6 June 2019

In response to the Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and the Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek

The European Union and its Member States would like to welcome Ambassador Pierre von Arx on the occasion of his third report to the Permanent Council, and Mr. Alexander Wolters, Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.

As a long-standing partner of Kyrgyzstan, the European Union supports the Kyrgyz Government in its progress towards democracy, the rule of law, sustainable socio-economic development, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The visit of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Miroslav Lajčák on 8 and 9 April 2019 helped to maintain the high-level co-operation between the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek and Kyrgyzstan.

In our opinion, Central Asia should remain a priority for the OSCE. The European Union is pleased to note that the Consultative Mechanism is facilitating dialogue with the competent authorities and with representatives of civil society and considers it important for the Office to continue to conduct its activities in the three dimensions throughout the entire country, giving the same weight to each of them.

Regarding the politico-military dimension, the European Union recognizes the importance of issues related to combating violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. We fully support the focus on activities to raise awareness among the young and to strengthen the role of women in the security sector. We advocate increased co-ordination with the European Union on these questions and with the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe. The European Union also welcomes the Office's activities to establish an Advance Passenger Information System for air travel and the progress made in a short period regarding border security.

In the economic and environmental dimension, we support the emphasis placed on good governance, combating corruption and money laundering, and promoting a green economy. We nevertheless urge the Office to concentrate on areas in which the OSCE offers genuine added value and to avoid duplication of the work of other international organizations.

In the human dimension, we encourage the Office to continue working to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and appreciate the expertise provided to the Kyrgyz authorities in judicial reform. We encourage the Office to continue its activities in support of the media and its excellent work in combating trafficking in human beings and in support of gender equality. We take this opportunity to point out that we are closely monitoring the situation of the human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, who has been

imprisoned since 2010. We recall that the United Nations Human Rights Committee called for his release in April 2016 and urge the authorities to take account of his worrying state of health.

We greatly welcome the support provided by the Programme Office to the elaboration of the 2018–2020 strategy to improve electoral legislation, which reflects most of the recommendations by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights contained in the final reports of the election observation missions in 2015 and 2017.

The Academy in Bishkek is a flagship project by the OSCE. It enjoys an excellent reputation in the region and helps to strengthen security and regional co-operation in Central Asia and with Afghanistan. We are pleased to learn that the number of registrations is steadily rising and that a procedure is being devised to incorporate it in the Erasmus+ European exchange programme. As its mainly extrabudgetary financing continues to jeopardize its long-term sustainability, we strongly support the inclusion of a larger part of the Academy's activities in the Unified Budget.

Finally, we call on the Kyrgyz authorities to comply with their financial commitments within the OSCE and exempt field mission staff from taxation or pay back the taxes collected to the Unified Budget.

In conclusion, we should like to thank the Ambassador and his team for the work they have performed.

The candidate countries North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Serbia¹ and Albania¹, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Andorra, align themselves with this statement.

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