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EU STATEMENT ON UZBEKISTAN

The European Union welcomes the circulation of the Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan. We have carefully studied these findings as well as the report's conclusions and recommendations and look forward to discuss them at the Permanent Council.

We remain profoundly concerned about the events in Uzbekistan. The report, and other recent reporting based on eye-witness accounts, adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting the use of disproportionate force by the Uzbek authorities. This makes firmer our conviction that an independent international enquiry should be held. We draw the attention of Uzbekistan once again to the conclusions adopted by EU Foreign Ministers on June 13. We urge the Uzbek authorities to co-operate with the OSCE and other relevant international organisations in this regard.

The EU deeply regrets that the ODIHR experts were refused entry to Uzbekistan. Experts were therefore not able to gather first hand information from the Uzbek authorities or people in Uzbekistan. As a result, the preliminary findings may not provide us with the whole picture of what happened in Andijan on 13 May. We call on the Uzbek authorities to establish immediate contact with ODIHR and to react positively to ODIHR's offer of assistance.

That said, the preliminary findings that summary executions may have taken place and that there are grounds to conclude that the indiscriminate and excessive use of force resulted in gross human rights violations are profoundly disturbing.

The European Union commends ODIHR for reacting in a quick and flexible manner in full conformity with its mandate. Such action is in line with ODIHR'S enhanced role in providing expert information and advice as defined by our Ministers.

We also thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media for his observations and recommendations regarding the information blockade on events in Andijan and harassment of journalists, including detention of people providing information on the events.

We will continue to follow closely the situation of Uzbek asylum seekers in Kyrgyzstan. We are concerned that pressure to return is being put on asylum seekers. We are alarmed by

indications that there is an imminent risk of further refoulement. We call for strict compliance with relevant commitments and obligations, in particular the International Convention on Refugees of 1951, and urge all parties to work in closest co-operation with UNHCR.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia¹, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

¹Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process