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EU statement on Kazakhstan

The EU has noted with great interest two documents circulated last week by the delegation of Kazakhstan reproducing statements by Kazakh participants at a recent conference on “Challenges of Kazakhstan: regional and global influence” hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce. We were pleased with the positive assessment of the OSCE reflected in the documents, including the confirmation that OSCE standards are a clear guideline and important goal for Kazakhstan. We equally welcome the expressed commitment to holding free and fair elections.

The first interim report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Kazakhstan notes a similar statement of commitment to ensure that the upcoming presidential elections meet OSCE and other international standards. While welcoming this, we are concerned about other findings of that report, particularly regarding limitations on freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

In this context, the EU is particularly concerned about reported harassment of opposition parties and violent disruption of their meetings. We must again register our concern about difficulties faced by opposition newspapers in Kazakhstan with regard to printing and distribution, as well as concerning circulation seizures. We are also disturbed by reports of an increasing number of attacks on journalists.

Similarly, we would like to support the recent call from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to withdraw a newly established regulation on the registration of domain names for websites, which, if implemented, would restrict freedom of expression.

We urge Kazakhstan to ensure that opposition candidates, their supporters and the media will be able to operate unhindered for the remainder of the election campaign and that all

voters have access to sufficient information representing all views in the political spectrum. We note the CEC's intentions to address some of the previous ODIHR recommendations regarding election administration and call on Kazakhstan to implement these.

Finally, we would like to use this opportunity to welcome the fact that the relevant authorities have recommended Galymzhan Zhakianov, co-founder of the now dissolved party *Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan*, for parole. We trust that Mr. Zhakianov will be released very soon.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

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