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EU Statement on presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan

The presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan on July 23 have been followed closely by the European Union. Overall, the conduct of the elections was a disappointment. Notwithstanding some positive elements, they failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections.

The EU shares the evaluations in the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, issued by the OSCE Election Observation Mission. We are especially concerned by the failure during the campaign to maintain a clear separation between the ruling party, Ak Jol, and the state. The bias displayed by state media towards the incumbent and the misuse of administrative resources made it difficult for voters to make an informed choice. We deplore the actions of pressure, obstruction and intimidation that were directed against the opposition and against voters. Taken together, these measures created an environment of distrust and undermined the public's confidence in the holding of genuinely democratic elections. The election campaign did not provide a level playing field for the candidates.

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On election day widespread irregularities were observed, including ballot box stuffing, voter list inaccuracies, some evidence of multiple voting and vote-buying as well as of predetermined results. We note with strong concern that the counting process was evaluated by OSCE observers as bad or very bad in more than half of the polling stations observed, and that OSCE observers in some cases were not allowed to observe the process of counting and tabulation. We are also concerned by reports on the arrest of a group of youth activists who were detained by police in the city of Balykchy. Against the background also of the recent detention of a large number of peaceful demonstrators in Bishkek and Besh-kungei village, the EU calls on Kyrgyzstan to respect its OSCE commitments to protect freedom of assembly, in particular under paragraph 9 of the Copenhagen Document.

The European Union also notes that there were some positive elements during the campaign period, including the very active engagement of civil society in the electoral process, which provided a key element of transparency and accountability. There was a distinct choice of candidates, who were generally able to campaign openly over throughout the country. There was also more transparency on campaign financing than in previous elections.

The overall impression is however one of severe shortcomings. The EU recalls that, in advance of the presidential elections, it voiced strong concerns in the context of the presidential elections on a number of occasions since March this year, noting disturbing tendencies with regard to the exercise of fundamental freedoms and encouraging Kyrgyzstan to ensure that it does not distance itself from the implementation of its OSCE commitments. Regrettably, the

election on July 23 was a missed opportunity to make the progress we had hoped for.

In view of these observations the EU calls upon the authorities to respond to and to resolve complaints fairly and in a transparent way. We hope that the assessment and recommendations of the OSCE Election Observation Mission, including the forthcoming OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, will be used as a basis for serious overhaul of the way elections are conducted in Kyrgyzstan in the future, and we urge Kyrgyzstan to continue to work closely with ODIHR. The European Union stands ready to assist Kyrgyzstan in its efforts to bring the election process into line with OSCE commitments.

The EU once again would like to underline the importance it attaches to the development of strong democratic institutions in Central Asia, as stipulated in the EU Strategy on Central Asia. The EU is convinced that Kyrgyzstan with its active and vivid civil society could play a leading role in the region, if following this path.

The candidate countries CROATIA* and FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and MONTENEGRO, as well as the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area ICELAND align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.