



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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## **Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**Permanent Council No. 700  
7 February 2008**

### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Centre in Astana, Ambassador Ivar Vikki**

The EU warmly welcomes Ambassador Vikki back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report, which provides a good overview of the Centre's broad-ranging activities in all three dimensions and of the more general developments in Kazakhstan.

We are pleased to note the Centre's enduring successful cooperation with both the authorities and the civil society of the host country. We appreciate the Centre's growing number of activities in the regions and we continue to attach importance to the work of the Office in Almaty. At the same time, the EU is working on implementing its own Strategy on Central Asia.

The EU finds that Ambassador Vikki's report to the Permanent Council comes at an appropriate time only a few months after the decision on the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship in 2010. We welcome the engagement the Kazakh Delegation to the OSCE has shown by chairing the Economic and Environmental Committee in 2008 and we are confident that Kazakhstan will also actively engage in the initiative by the Finnish Chairmanship to hold regular quintet meetings. We are pleased to note that the Centre in Astana has begun to raise awareness on OSCE activities and train Kazakh officials as an additional task of its mandate. The EU stands ready to assist Kazakhstan in preparing for the Chairmanship in 2010 and looks forward to engaging with Kazakhstan in areas relevant to the OSCE.

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The EU is pleased to note the endeavours of Kazakhstan to bring its legislation and local practices in line with its commitments to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In this regard, we welcome the recognition by Kazakhstan of the competence of the UN Committee against Torture.

The Kazakh government has reiterated its firm commitment to continue its democratic reform process and conduct a series of specific reform measures this year. Ambassador Vikki has noted that positive dynamics for further democratisation exist. We encourage the Kazakh government to make full use of this momentum and the assistance that the OSCE Centre in Astana, ODIHR and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media can provide, in order to strengthen civil society and political pluralism. The EU would welcome further information from the Kazakh government on the specific contents of the envisaged reforms and would like to hear more about concrete timelines for their implementation.

In particular, the EU attaches great importance to further progress in the work to amend the media law, and we hope that the recommendations by the Representative of the Freedom of the Media and the journalistic community will be taken into consideration.

The EU welcomes the fact that a series of roundtables is planned for the first half of 2008 in cooperation with ODIHR and the Centre on the new draft law on elections, and we hope that this will result in further development of the legal framework. We would also like to see concrete measures to liberalise registration procedures for political parties.

The EU is pleased to note that a Public Chamber under the Majilis was established in November 2007 and hopes that this initiative will be one of many to improve the

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dialogue between the parliament, the opposition and civil society. We take note of Ambassador Vikki's assessment that there have been some positive trends within the judiciary and we would welcome further progress in this field, especially when it comes to the transparency and impartiality of courts. The EU also hopes to see concrete steps to enhance the law enforcement system.

The EU takes note of a number of shortcomings in the areas of human rights and fundamental freedoms and hopes that these will be addressed. Areas of particular concern include freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and prison conditions.

The EU expects that the Centre in Astana will carry on with the many activities in cooperation with the Kazakh authorities and civil society. As this is the last time Ambassador Vikki addresses the Permanent Council in his capacity of Head of the OSCE Centre in Astana, we would like to thank him for his very dedicated and successful work and wish him the best of success in his future activities.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Iceland, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

\* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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