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Statement of the European Union in response to the Secretary of State of Kazakhstan H.E. Kanat B. Saudabayev

The EU welcomes H.E. the Secretary of State of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kanat B. Saudabayev, to the Permanent Council.

The EU attaches high value to its relationship with Kazakhstan, which has potential for further deepening with the adoption of the EU Strategy on Central Asia in June 2007. As outlined in the Strategy, the EU would like to intensify cooperation in a number of fields, including human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democracy, education, economic development, border management, energy and environmental policies as well as security issues. Many of these areas are particularly relevant to the OSCE, and the EU looks forward to continuing and expanding its cooperation with Kazakhstan as well as with other Central Asian states, also in the OSCE context.

The EU thanks Secretary of State Saudabayev for his confirmation of Kazakhstan's continued readiness to assume the responsibility for chairing the OSCE. The EU welcomes Kazakh aspirations to play a leading role in the OSCE and reiterates its long-held view that any Chairmanship-in-Office must exemplify the principles of the organisation and be committed to full compliance with all OSCE undertakings and standards. The EU is pleased that Kazakhstan

regards its bid for the Chairmanship as an opportunity to provide a stimulus for reform, thus contributing to the fulfilment of its OSCE commitments.

In this regard, the EU has been following closely the conduct of the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan on 18 August this year. The EU welcomes the progress noted in the preliminary findings and conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission. However, the International Election Observation Mission also reported that the early called parliamentary elections failed to meet a number of international standards. The EU especially shares the concern about the high seven per cent threshold for representation in the Majilis, which has not allowed opposition parties any seats in Parliament, the negative assessment of the transparency of the counting of votes in over 40 percent of the polling stations visited, instances of favourable treatment of the governing Nur Otan party by authorities and in the state media and provisions that political parties only after the elections choose which candidates from their lists will become members of Parliament.

While awaiting the additional findings in the final ODIHR election observation report, the EU encourages Kazakhstan to work closely with OSCE/ODIHR in implementing the recommendations of the final report to further improve the overall electoral process. The election process is not over yet and matters such as ensuring the efficient and transparent follow-up to complaints will still require attention in the post-election period. As before, the EU calls on the Government of Kazakhstan to proceed with the election legislation reform process and to bring the election law in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. The EU would also welcome a reform of the law on political parties in order to ease the registration requirements for political parties.

As the parliamentary elections resulted in only one party passing the seven percent threshold, the EU urges the Kazakh authorities to ensure that opposition parties are given a public voice in decision-making processes.

The EU encourages Kazakhstan to continue the implementation of political and democratic reforms in other areas as well. Among the issues to which the EU pays special attention are protection and promotion of human rights, freedom of the media, complete abolition of the death penalty, strengthening of civil society and political parties and enhancement of the judicial and law enforcement system. We look forward to tangible steps in all of the areas mentioned and would be interested in learning about the timelines envisaged for such steps.

The EU continues to follow closely the media situation in Kazakhstan. We note the ongoing deliberations on a new media law, which has been welcomed by the Representative on the Freedom of Media. We hope that recommendations from civil society and NGO's will be taken on board in the final draft and that it will be made available for thorough public debate and comments. It is the hope of the European Union that a new media law would be passed soon and will significantly improve media freedom in Kazakhstan.

The EU stands ready to assist Kazakhstan to implement its political and democratic reforms. We invite Kazakhstan to avail itself of the expertise, which can be provided by the OSCE and its institutions, notably through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of Media, and the OSCE Centre in Astana.

We would like to thank once again Secretary of State Mr. Saudabayev for addressing the Permanent Council today and wish him and his country success in pursuing their ambitious goals.

The Candidate Countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as 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.