



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1314 Vienna, 20 May 2021**

#### **EU statement on the Report by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador Pierre von Arx**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Pierre von Arx to the Permanent Council in his new role and thank him and his team for their comprehensive report.

We appreciate the continued engagement of Uzbekistan with the OSCE. We welcome that despite the COVID-19 situation, two high level visits took place – that of the Swedish Chairperson in Office, Minister Ann Linde, and that of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Mr. Matteo Mecacci. Uzbekistan's commitment to reform the country is well demonstrated by a number of joint projects by the PCUz, governmental authorities, and civil society, as well as by the increased pace of reforms within the Action Strategy 2017-2021, which are linked to the OSCE set of values. We highly value that Uzbekistan's Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, Ms. Tanzila Narbaeva participated in a number of OSCE events, including in the OSCE Gender Review Conference. We encourage Uzbekistan to continue promoting women's participation in public life and pursue projects that empower women.

We commend the PCUz's gender mainstreaming efforts in line with the OSCE 2004 Gender Action Plan, as well as the regular information about these activities in the monthly reports. We were pleased to learn that the PCUz managed to adjust its working methods to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, so that the activities could continue. We also praise the PCUz for the good cooperation with other OSCE institutions and structures, as well as with other international actors.

We welcome the results of the numerous projects and activities carried out by the PCUz in all three dimensions as well as the cross-cutting ones. Their common denominators are enhancing security, strengthening democracy and increasing the quality of people's lives in Uzbekistan. We would like to highlight in particular the projects on the role of the media, either in preventing terrorism, or in countering the COVID-19-related disinformation and false narratives. We welcome the focus on countering transnational threats, counter-terrorism, preventing violent extremism and radicalisation and enhancing cybersecurity, while preserving media freedom. Other projects contribute to increasing socio-economic development and improve good governance, including by increasing transparency and fighting corruption. We also welcome activities aimed at strengthening environmental aspects of security. We strongly support the focus on women's empowerment, combating violence against women and girls as well as addressing trafficking in human beings. The projects concerning the rights of women, as well as of marginalized groups should be pursued further. We suggest that the potential for co-operation with the "Central Asia Women Leaders" established in 2020 and currently led by Uzbekistan's Speaker of the Senate Tanzila Narbaeva should be explored.

We regret the difficulties of the PCUz in keeping a competitive local salary scale, which is crucial for engaging and keeping dedicated, qualified staff. Similarly, the PCUz has been facing difficulties in filling the secondee posts due to insufficient and constantly diminishing Board and Lodging Allowances. Both of these issues should be addressed and we appeal to other participating States to keep them in mind when negotiating the budget provisions.

Uzbekistan is an important partner for the European Union. We welcome the progress in the ongoing negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Uzbekistan. The EU continues to support reform efforts in Uzbekistan. We attach great importance to the security, stability and prosperity of Uzbekistan and the whole region. We underline the EU Strategy on Central Asia, which focuses on promoting resilience, prosperity and regional cooperation in Central Asia. The implementation of this strategy provides a valuable opportunity for the EU and Central Asia to forge a strong and durable partnership. The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law, civil society, the rights of women and sustainable development, and good governance, among others, remain at the core of our relations. The EU also runs projects aiming at improved environmental protection and rural

development. We continue to co-operate with Uzbekistan in order to alleviate the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the EU thanks Ambassador von Arx and his able team for their dedicated work. We wish you a lot of success.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.