



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1108
Vienna, 14 July 2016**

**EU Statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Mission
to Skopje, H.E. Ambassador Nina Suomalainen**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Nina Suomalainen, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, back to the Permanent Council and thank her for her comprehensive report.

The European Union has consistently reiterated its commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans, in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda and in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association process, including regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations. It is in this framework that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been granted the status of candidate country. In this regard, we recall the conclusions of the 15 December 2015 General Affairs Council of the European Union.

Although, more than a month has passed since the Parliament has reconvened, regrettably we have not seen much progress to address the deep political crisis facing the country. The EU is seriously concerned about this situation. We underline the importance we attach to the full implementation of the June/July 2015 Pržino Agreement.

We also recall that democracy is strengthened through full participation in institutions, to ensure their democratic functioning and greater checks and balances. We firmly believe that full implementation of the Pržino agreement and the Government Action Plan on Urgent Reform Priorities under the EU/US-led process remain the best way to move the country out of the current crisis through restoring public trust and

establishing a more integrated society. We underline the need for the country's political leadership to engaging in an open and constructive dialogue to jointly address all issues. Parties need to agree on the way forward to implement this agreement, including by ensuring the conditions for credible elections. In this regard, we note the assessment and recommendations provided in the final report published by ODIHR.

We recall the importance we attach to the appointment of the Special Prosecutor, and the successful fulfilment of her task for a credible and full investigation into the wiretapping allegations. We remain concerned about the challenges to her work and we call on all parties that agreed to establish this institution, to stop obstructing and instead to give it their full support. Additionally, all issues that this office faces also need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

We share Ambassador Suomalainen's concerns that the political crisis can affect the development of the country required to ensure a democratic and inclusive state. The deteriorating situation in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms is a source of our continued concern. The pardons issued by the President – although subsequently rescinded – raise serious issues of accountability. We welcome the Mission's ongoing work on the three priorities of its mandate: supporting further implementation of Ohrid Framework Agreement; advancing constructive inter-ethnic relations; and maintaining the Mission's effective monitoring and early warning capacity, including through the invaluable role of its field station in Tetovo. We commend the important monitoring and confidence building activities of the Mission, which also serve as an early warning mechanism.

We welcome the Mission's pro-active support, together with the European Institute of Peace, to initiate a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. We strongly encourage the government to now complete this process in an inclusive and transparent manner and would appreciate Ambassador's Suomalainen's reflections on how the Mission is adapting its approach to this work in light of the challenging political environment and lack of government functionality.

We share the Mission's assessment that the country still faces serious challenges regarding media freedom and are concerned by the reported downward trend. We would appreciate further information on how the Mission intends to support progress in this area.

The European Union fully supports the Mission's continuous efforts on promoting the rule of law, including its assistance in the implementation of Criminal Justice Reform and development of a professional police service. We commend the continuing efforts of the Mission to promote a modern police service complying with international standards, including respect for human rights, to strengthen community policing, and the fight against organised crime and terrorism.

With regards to the migration and refugee crisis, we commend the Mission for working with local and international stakeholders on this issue.

We underline the importance of the Mission investing in enhanced cooperation with other OSCE field operations in the region, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities including on improving political and inter-ethnic dialogue. Further coordination with national and international counterparts and civil society organisations should also remain a priority.

Effective evaluation is essential for all field operations in ensuring the efficient use of resources, and that activities remain result-oriented. We would be grateful if Ambassador Suomalainen could highlight some of the key impacts of the Mission's programmatic work in this period, and what is planned by way of evaluation during the next year.

Finally, we would like to assure you, Ambassador, of our full support and wish you and your team success in your important work.

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

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