



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. 703
28 February 2008**

EU statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad

The European Union welcomes Ambassador Urstad back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU is pleased to note that the presidential elections held in Serbia on 20 January and 3 February were considered by international observers to have been in line with international standards. We agree with Ambassador Urstad that these elections demonstrated that Serbia has further strengthened its democratic institutions and procedures. The EU is pleased that the Serbian people have again chosen the path of democracy and a European future for their country.

The EU reiterates its commitment to the European perspective of Serbia. Serbia has a crucial role to play in the Western Balkans, both for ensuring stability and as a motor for the economic development and prosperity of the region. The European Union wishes to deepen its relationship with Serbia, and has offered to intensify political co-operation with a view to accelerating Serbia's progress towards the EU, including candidate status. The Serbian people are part of the European family. A deepening relationship between the European Union and Serbia, leading to membership, will bring concrete benefits to the people of Serbia. The Stabilisation and Association process remains the right vehicle to take forward this relationship. The EU is committed to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement as soon as the necessary steps have been finalised.

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The European Union commends the continued strong performance of the OSCE Mission to Serbia in implementing its broad mandate and welcomes the good relations it has developed with the Serbian authorities. We welcome the Mission's intention to continue shifting its emphasis away from providing capacity building and legislative expertise towards implementation and strategic support. We agree that the Mission should be helping Serbia to drive the democratic reform process itself and encourage all Serbian Ministries to co-operate fully with the Mission across its full range of activities.

We particularly value the Mission's work on minority rights and multi-ethnic activities in South Serbia, and we also welcome its increasing focus on the Sandzak/Raska region. We encourage the Serbian government to pay more attention to these regions and to reinforce the OSCE Mission's good work there.

The EU fully supports the Mission's focus on promoting reconciliation and regional co-operation and encourages the Serbian authorities to support this process throughout the region. The EU attaches particular importance to the Mission's work in addressing war crimes issues, including through projects designed to promote awareness of the atrocities committed and support for the prosecution of the perpetrators. We are pleased to see from the report that the Mission's work in this area is beginning to bear fruit and back the Mission's endeavours to foster cooperation with the ICTY. The EU agrees with Ambassador Urstad that further improvements in regional judicial co-operation on war crimes proceedings will require stronger political support and a better legal framework in Serbia.

The EU notes with concern the lack of progress made last year on refugee returns and IDPs. The EU supports the Mission's efforts to promote regional co-operation to resolve the outstanding problems in this area. The EU would also like to see the

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Mission continue its efforts to promote regional co-operation in other areas, notably border policing and in the fight against human trafficking and terrorism.

The EU welcomes the Mission's work to promote the rule of law and the reform of the judiciary in Serbia. In particular it supports its efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Serbian authorities - and the independence and impartiality of the police and judiciary - to combat organised crime and corruption. We note the uneven progress made by Serbia in this area. We value the Mission's activities in respect of police reform and hope that its co-operation with the Interior Ministry will improve so that progress in this key area can accelerate. The EU encourages the Mission to assist the newly established institution of the Protector of Citizens.

The EU values the Mission's activities on media freedom and development and would like to see the Mission continue to work with the media and NGOs to help them fulfil their important roles in a democratic Serbia. In this respect, we are grateful to Ambassador Urstad for having drawn attention to the recent attacks and threats aimed at journalists and join him in calling for better protection of all journalists in Serbia.

Finally Mr Chairman we would like once again to thank Ambassador Urstad for addressing the Permanent Council today. He can be proud of his Mission's work in helping Serbia pursue its democratic reform agenda, and can count on the EU's continued strong support.

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 and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Iceland,

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as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia 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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