



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No.1521**

**Vienna, 22 May 2025**

### **EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Kilian Wahl**

1. The European Union commends the OSCE Mission to Skopje for its work as a trusted partner for both host country beneficiaries and the international community. We thank Ambassador Wahl for his comprehensive annual report on the Mission's initiatives.
2. In light of the current challenging geopolitical context, marked by the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the OSCE and its field operations continue to be imperative in promoting and safeguarding security and stability across the OSCE area.
3. We take positive note of the presidential and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia in April and May 2024. According to ODIHR, the elections took place in a peaceful and democratic atmosphere, were competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected, although the process remained insufficiently regulated, and instances of discriminatory rhetoric, including the use of strongly nationalistic slogans, were observed throughout the campaign period. We underline that North Macedonia should implement all outstanding ODIHR recommendations rapidly, well ahead of the next local elections in 2025.
4. We welcome the Mission's 2025–2027 strategy with its cross-dimensional approach and its concentration on five thematic priority areas: criminal justice; fundamental rights and social cohesion; integrity, anti-corruption and good governance; gender equality; and youth empowerment. We particularly

welcome the Mission's strategic focus on adaptability, sustainability, and impact - objectives that are especially relevant in the current context of limited operational flexibility due to the lack of an agreed unified budget and an updated post table.

5. The EU appreciates the Mission's activities in support of inclusive governance, institutional integrity, gender equality, civic participation, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. We fully support the Mission's continuous efforts to promote constructive inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion, including with youth organisations. We welcome the continuation of the Bitola Task Force, which contributes to fostering the relationship between persons belonging to the Roma community and police forces. We encourage an inclusive approach to integrate representatives of all minorities and communities in the Mission's scope of activities.
6. The EU commends the Mission's work on media policy with a special focus on freedom of the media and safety of journalists. We commend the Mission's legal and statistical review of hate crime and hate speech legislation and its pivotal role in enhancing institutional and civil society capacities to address these, including through the Network against Hate Speech in the Media.
7. We appreciate the Mission's activities to foster parliamentary democracy, public administration reform, and promote the rule of law, including the Mission's new partnership with the constitutional court and efforts to strengthen judicial independence. We encourage the Mission to continue working with the rule-of-law actors and judicial institutions, focusing on enhancing judicial independence, integrity, efficiency and capacity-building, as well as fostering co-operation between police and prosecutors.
8. The EU commends the Mission's work to advance criminal justice and the promotion of fair trial standards, including through the implementation of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project.

9. We appreciate the Mission's sustained contribution to the fight against corruption, organised crime, threats to cybersecurity, financial and environmental offenses, domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, and its efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorism. We commend its work to modernise the police forces, bolster regional cooperation in border management, and its assistance on Small Arms and Light Weapons.
10. We reaffirm the EU's full and unequivocal commitment to the European Union membership perspective of the region and reiterate our unwavering support for the European integration of the Western Balkans, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality, and the principle of own merits. This is in our mutual interest. We encourage implementation of the reform agendas under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans to boost socio-economic convergence, bring partners closer to the EU and support their accession track. We also reiterate our full support for the Western Balkans partners' reaffirmed commitment to inclusive regional cooperation and the strengthening of good neighbourly relations, including with EU Member States.
11. We agree that the EU accession process could provide concrete opportunities for the Mission to support reforms in areas of national priority that align with OSCE commitments.
12. Finally, we wish you, Ambassador Wahl, and your able team every success for the further work of the mission.

*Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.*