



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1177
Vienna, 1 March 2018**

**EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE
Mission to Montenegro, H.E. Ambassador Maryse Daviet**

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Maryse Daviet, Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro to the Permanent Council and thanks her for the report on the Mission's activities over the past year. We also appreciate the timely distribution of your report.

We welcome Montenegro's continued reform efforts and progress on its path to joining the European Union so far. This as well as the remaining challenges were reflected also in the recently published EU strategy for Western Balkans and reiterated by President Juncker and the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn during their visits to Podgorica. It is clear that more work in strengthening rule of law, democratic institutions and implementing public administration reform is needed. The European Union stands ready to support Montenegro in tackling the remaining challenges.

This year will offer a unique opportunity to make significant progress on the European perspective of the region. We look forward to the EU Western Balkans Summit in May in Sofia, as well as the July Berlin Process Summit in London, and we expect both to strengthen the European perspective and connectivity in and with the Western Balkans.

We welcome that part of the opposition has returned to the parliament. We call on all political parties to demonstrate responsibility and contribute constructively to the political dialogue and return the political debate to the parliament where it belongs. This is important also in light of presidential elections scheduled to take place on 15 April. Inclusive political dialogue is important for the overall transformation process,

which is crucial for EU accession. This requires both commitment and political will from the government and the opposition, as well as engagement with civil society.

The EU supports the assessment of the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, and implementation of its recommendations remains a priority and should be done in a transparent and inclusive way. We note that some progress has been achieved, but we regret that due to the boycott by the opposition and the consequent absence of the necessary voting majority the parliament failed to adopt the new Electoral Law.

As already mentioned it is also important to see continuous impact of the rule of law reforms in the form of tangible results on the ground. This includes fighting corruption and organised crime, as well as protecting human rights. Progress on rule of law will continue to determine the overall pace of EU accession negotiations with Montenegro.

We encourage Montenegro to continue its efforts to achieve further progress in promoting freedom of the media, including safety of journalists, also in close co-operation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media, who recently visited Podgorica. Public broadcasters need to remain independent and shielded from undue influence and political pressure from any side. We are following very closely developments with the RTCG Council.

The EU commends Montenegro for its continued commitment to regional cooperation and its constructive role in maintaining regional stability and to its EU path. Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations form an essential part of this process. They contribute to stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and the legacies of the past.

We congratulate Montenegro on joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation last June, which represents a key milestone on its Euro-Atlantic path. We also appreciate the full alignment of Montenegro on all EU foreign and security policy issues.

Mr. Chairperson, we are pleased that the Mission has been developing a focused approach on the key priorities and welcome its activities, including in areas of elections, parliamentary support, media freedom, rule of law, human rights, gender equality, combatting trafficking in human beings, addressing environmental issues as

well as tackling organized crime, supporting police reform, arms control and displacement. We also support the Mission's continued work regarding the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme. We welcome its focus on the engagement of civil society in the reform processes and value the Mission's close cooperation with the international community, other OSCE field operations and its continued active role in the region.

In light of the approaching presidential elections in mid-April we commend the Mission's activities as well as its cooperation with ODIHR in technical assistance with the aim of strengthening the electoral legislative framework. We encourage it to continue with its active engagement in this field after the elections, in close cooperation with EU services.

Concerning gender equality, the EU is pleased that this is one of the priorities of the Mission. We therefore commend its activities at the local level, the support it offers to the Network of Municipal Gender Focal Points as well as its awareness raising about gender-based violence. We also welcome the Mission's engagement on this issue with the parliament, where it supported inter alia the efforts to mainstream gender impact assessments in all phases of the legislative process.

We welcome the Mission's continued cooperation with the Ministry of Interior in its efforts to reduce the amount of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in circulation by supporting awareness raising activities as well as its cooperation with FSC Support Section in organizing events in this field. We also note the valuable contribution in tackling organized crime also by supporting regional cooperation in this regard.

We commend the focus on youth related activities, where the Mission assisted in the development of the 2018 Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Youth as well as its support in raising public awareness about Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and promotion of its first local branch that was opened in Podgorica.

In conclusion, last year the Mission went through a strategic programmatic re-focusing and we look forward to its full implementation. We welcome the excellent cooperation with the host country, also in light of aligning with its national strategic

priorities where the Mission can provide specific value added and achieve strategic impact.

Finally, we thank you, Ambassador, for your presentation and wish you and your team success in your work in the coming year.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF 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 SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.