



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 957 Vienna, 27 June 2013

EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, H.E. Ambassador Ralph Breth

The EU and its Member States warmly welcome the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, H.E. Ambassador Ralph Breth, back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

The EU 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 Stabilisation and Association Process conditionality, 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 11 December 2012 General Affairs Council of the EU.

We recall the statements by the EU following the events of 24 December 2012 and the facilitation by Commissioner Füle of the 1 March political agreement between political leaders to overcome the ensuing political crisis. We note the importance that the EU attaches to the full implementation of that agreement.

We also take note of the Mission's evaluation that, despite progress in some areas since its last report in November, the country has shown little improvement in others, while expressing concerns regarding areas of deterioration of the political dialogue and the still fragile inter-community relations. There is also a need for further progress in the implementation of the longer-term goals of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Mission's work in this field. In this context, we also support the Mission's important confidence-building role on the ground through its monitoring activities, including through its Office in Tetovo, also as an early-warning mechanism and especially in inter-ethnic relations and religious / confessional affairs and education.

With regard to freedom of the media, including media pluralism and safety of journalists, the EU is concerned at recent developments, such as the closure in a very short period of several critical media outlets citing financial difficulties also due to the selective choice of ad placement by the Government. In the same light, we note with similar concern the 30 day pre-trial detention in May of a journalist in connection with an article he published 5 years ago, which was already criticised by the Representative on Freedom of Media and other media watchdogs.

We continue to follow closely the discussions related to the new draft Law on Media and welcome that the government sought OSCE and Council of Europe advice regarding the draft. We are encouraged that the government is willing to revise the draft taking into account comments made by these organisations and local stakeholders. The EU is closely monitoring the process and have called on the government to present a draft that would not limit media freedom in the country through the application of unnecessary restrictions and over-regulation of both online and offline media. We call on the country's authorities to continue seeking the advice and assistance of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Council of Europe, on this and other related matters and we hope that there will be progress on the implementation of the law on the decriminalisation of defamation and insult that was adopted last year.

The EU fully supports the Mission's activities on promoting the rule of law, including its support for the adoption of laws relating to reform of the judiciary, its assistance in law-making and the promotion of the ongoing criminal justice reform. Independence of the judiciary is a key component of democratic institutions. We also support OSCE monitoring of sensitive trials,, monitoring of the judicial system and evaluation of legislation in line with European standards, as well as assistance in support of efforts to combat discrimination and promote equal treatment.

Parliament has a crucial role to play in the reform agenda. Its role as the key democratic institution should be supported and strengthened. In that regard, we call on all parties to remain engaged with democratic institutions and to refrain from actions that could worsen the political situation in the country. We hope that the recent meetings between the leader of the opposition and the Prime Minister can be further built on with a view to fostering greater cross-party dialogue.

We appreciate the continuing efforts of the Mission to promote a modern police service complying with international standards, including respect for human rights. We also note its recommendation that, in pursuing the implementation of police reform, the authorities should seek to reduce political interference and to promote equitable representation of all ethnic communities within the public administration.

The EU commends the work of the Mission on issues pertaining to Good Governance and its important support for electoral reform. We look forward to further efforts by the government to address outstanding OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

With regard to the “Strategy on Integrated Education” developed by the authorities in cooperation with the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and adopted by the Government in October 2010, we welcome the role of the Mission in monitoring developments in the education sector. We encourage the authorities to intensify their efforts towards implementation of the proposed structural reforms in promoting integrated education which we believe to be of key importance for the future of society. To this end, the Mission should continue to closely co-ordinate its activities with national authorities and other international donors active in this sphere.

We reiterate our belief that the Mission, in carrying out its Mandate and in close coordination with the EU and other international actors on the ground, should continue to assist the country to implement legislation which meets European standards and complies with its international commitments. In this context, we believe that the current mandate remains a sound basis for the Mission’s work. We encourage the authorities of the host country to take full advantage of the OSCE’s assistance when they pursue their ambitious reform agenda.

In a challenging resource climate, OSCE operations need to be leaner and sharper in fulfilling their mandate effectively. We, therefore, welcome the initiatives and efforts of the Mission to reprioritise and improve the focus of its programmatic structures and activities.

In conclusion, we would like to assure Ambassador Ralf Breth and his team of our continued support and wish them success in their important work.

The Acceding Country CROATIA*, the Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA, align themselves with this statement.

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

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.