



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE
HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION TO SERBIA

Delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 18 March 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chair,

As others, we welcome Ambassador Jan Braathu back to the Permanent Council in his new capacity as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and thank him for his report.

In the reporting period, Serbia has continued to pursue and implement its reform agenda, also against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic. We value the efforts and progress that has been made, while also dealing with the unprecedented challenges of balancing the health, freedoms, and rights of the citizens with the impact of the pandemic on the economy.

We commend that the efforts to amend the constitution has continued after the election held last June, as there are important steps left to take to attain judicial independence and full separation of powers. We appreciate the work of the Mission to assist in these efforts, and trust that judicial reform and the rule of law will remain high on Belgrade's agenda also in the time to come.

We have taken note of ODIHR's recommendations after the last election, and trust that the Mission will stand ready to also assist the host Government in addressing the issues mentioned in ODIHR's report.

Freedom of the media is an essential element of democracy and remains a priority to Norway. Last year, we highlighted the Mission's valuable contribution to the new Media Strategy. With the Action Plan adopted in December, we hope the momentum will be followed by efforts to improve media legislation, foster a transparent and pluralistic media environment, and ensure safety of journalists. We thank the Mission for its close co-operation with the government of Serbia, civil society, and the media in this important work.

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We appreciate Serbia's efforts to fight corruption. The Mission has helped the host Government in meeting international recommendations and strengthening the capacities of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and the Serbian Police. Countering corruption is important in its own right, but also to achieve the goal of countering and preventing transnational threats and organised crime. In this vein, we also commend the Mission's work on police reform and accountability, and in fostering regional co-operation in investigating organised crime. By increasing contact and co-operation across national borders, the OSCE helps preserve our common security.

Norway sees the Field Operations as one of the key assets of the OSCE, as they provide tailored and dedicated support to the participating States. The Mission to Serbia has provided ample evidence for this in their report, for which we are thankful. We appreciate that the report also puts the activities conducted into a broader political context. However, we would also like to hear some further reflections on the challenges that the Mission meets in achieving its goals and implementing its mandate with limited resources. This would be useful to us as participating States.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Mission for its longstanding and excellent co-operation with our Embassy in Belgrade. To conclude, Madame Chair, Norway looks forward to continuing the fruitful co-operation with the Mission, both in Belgrade and in Vienna, now with Ambassador Braathu at the helm.

Thank you.