



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1068 Vienna, 17 September 2015

EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Florian Raunig

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania and thank him for his comprehensive report.

The European Union commends the work of the Presence in assisting Albania to meet its OSCE commitments and welcomes its focus on promoting democratisation, the rule of law and human rights, including the protection of minorities, and consolidation of democratic institutions. All of them represent key areas for Albania's process of integration in the European Union.

Last year the Council of the European Union decided to grant Albania the status of a candidate country to EU accession, acknowledging the progress made by the country.

As also acknowledged by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania's report, considerable further efforts are needed in a number of key reform areas, such as the reform of the public administration and of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the protection of fundamental rights, including anti-discrimination policies as well as the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The European Union shares the assessment of the Head of the OSCE Presence that a sustainable political dialogue between the government and the opposition and constructive work in the Parliament remain important elements for a successful reform process of the country. In this respect, the EU urges all parties to focus on this process and resume political dialogue in a spirit of transparency and moderation.

A thorough reform of the judiciary remains crucial. We note that Albania declared reform a top priority for 2015 and that it has already taken the initial steps to develop a Strategy for Justice System Reform and an Action Plan. Greater effort is needed to

build an independent judiciary, with proper accountability for judges, able to effectively implement and uphold the rule of law. Effective justice reform is potentially transformative for Albania and would underpin other action to tackle organised crime and corruption. It would also encourage foreign investment and economic growth, through a fair rules-based and predictable business climate.

We welcome the OSCE / ODIHR recommendations, as contained in the final election report, with a view to improving the conduct of elections in Albania and to bringing them fully in line with the OSCE commitments and standards. The European Union notes with concern ODIHR's findings and encourages Albania to implement these recommendations and those of previous reports as Prime Minister Rama undertook on 22 June.

Work needs to continue in order to strengthen de-politicisation, accountability and professional standards of public administration, with the latter particularly crucial in ensuring sustainability of reform efforts. Despite some progress in the fight against corruption, compared with last year, it is still prevalent in many areas including the judiciary, and remains a particularly serious problem. Albania should intensify its efforts and implement its newly adopted anti-corruption strategy and action plan.

The fight against organised crime shows a positive trend in a number of areas, with an intensification of law enforcement activities including drug-related crimes, economic crime, and trafficking of human beings. The fight against organized crime and corruption, including among high-level officials, needs to remain a top priority. We welcome the assistance of the OSCE Presence to the Albanian authorities in these areas and encourage its continuation.

We commend the efforts of Albania in recognising the challenges of countering violent extremism and in organising a summit on this issue in Tirana on 19 to 21 May 2015.

In the field of human rights, the European Union notes that while the overall legal framework is in place, its implementation still remains a challenge and some revisions are needed, including anti-discrimination and gender provisions. Adoption of legislation in order to provide equal and non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to all minorities remains crucial.

We emphasise the value of regional co-operation and strongly support Albania's constructive role in this regard. We welcome efforts by the Presence to further regional cooperation, which will remain a key priority.

The European Union continues to attach high value to the activities of the Presence aimed at supporting the Albanian authorities in the promotion of good governance, in building administrative capacities and meeting international standards in elections, media freedom and anti-discrimination. We also commend the Presence for its work on gender mainstreaming.

The European Union calls on the Presence to fully make use the capacities of the OSCE institutions and to closely co-ordinate its work with the relevant international partners, in particular the European Union, in order to avoid duplications and optimise results, in line with Albania's European Union integration aspirations.

We underline that for the Presence in Albania, and for all field operations, effective evaluation based on benchmarking and performance indicators is essential to ensure efficient use of resources and aids the development of best practices and the process of lesson learning. We commend the presence for focusing significant efforts on evaluation, and see this as a good example for field operations. We hope that as far as possible evaluations and their results will be shared with participating States. We welcome the continued efforts to streamline the activities of the Presence where the gradual transfer of activities to the national and local authorities entails ownership of the reforms and would appreciate further information from Ambassador Raunig on progress in this regard and prospects for the next year. We welcome the account of activities undertaken in this reporting period and the focus in his report on outcomes and the Presence's contribution to areas of progress in Albania.

In concluding, we would like to thank Ambassador Raunig and his staff for their high-quality work and their excellent political and operational cooperation and wish them every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ICELAND+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.