



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1182 Vienna, 19 April 2018

EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Bruce Berton, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the Permanent Council, and thank him for his first report on the activities of the Mission.

We strongly support the Mission in assisting the host country on all levels. We underline the importance of co-operation and coordination with other relevant international players and in this instance we encourage the Mission to continue with appropriate, flexible and tailor-made engagement of its unique wide field presence. We especially welcome activities in the areas of rule of law, education, safety of journalists, war crimes cases processing, security sector reform and arms control, prevention and fight against terrorism and radicalisation, freedom of media and expression, as well as combating hate speech, promotion of tolerance, reconciliation, inter-religious dialogue, and support to the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman. Effective impact-based evaluation is of key importance for all the Mission's activities and we would welcome this self-assessment perspective to be included into the future reports.

We are concerned by political instability and the standstill in the reform process, namely in the areas of rule of law, public administration and anti-corruption. It is all the more important that the Mission keeps or even strengthens its activities in those fields where it can bring added value. In this regard we commend the work of the Mission on the local level with concrete and tangible impacts. Intensified regional outreach and wider regional co-operation in areas like non-discriminatory education, human rights or trafficking in human beings or SALW also help to bring concrete and more sustainable results.

It is a matter of utmost urgency for the host country to address the December 2016 ruling by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina concerning specific electoral provisions on the Federation House of Peoples, as highlighted also in the 2018 Commission report released two days ago. The electoral reforms should be approached in a spirit of consensus and dialogue having also in mind that the current deadlock is unsustainable and can lead to an institutional crisis that could deepen already widespread political instability and uncertainty. We welcome the support the Mission provided to the discussions between the political parties facilitated by the EU and the US, and acknowledge the importance of the inclusive engagement between the Mission and relevant international and local stakeholders.

Inclusive, better integrated, non-discriminatory and quality education persists to be a challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus also one of the key areas of the Mission's activities. Here we commend the active approach and the prominent role of the Mission and invite it to stay focused on this issue. We also take note of the development of "Guidelines for Recognizing Discrimination in the Field of Education" and would like to learn more about its implementation in practice.

We appreciate the Mission's assistance in reducing the backlog of war crimes cases through concrete practical steps like provision of training and workshops, through monitoring of court proceedings or systematic compilation of regular reports with relevant recommendations. An independent, professional and accountable judiciary, free from political influence is of the utmost importance for processing war crimes.

The EU welcomes and encourages the Mission's engagement in contributing to Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts in countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism and we would like to hear Amb. Berton's insights on this. We particularly appreciate the support provided for a number of youth-led activities in this regard and we look forward to increased co-operation with the Regional Youth Co-operation Office (RYCO).

Preventing and combating corruption is a relatively new, but important priority of the Mission. We would be interested in an evaluation of the impacts of the Mission's engagement at state and local level with special emphasis on the support provided to the national Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (APIK) and on the trial monitoring programme of corruption cases. We welcome the recently launched

Mission's first fact-based assessment of the quality of judicial response to corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authorities should ensure that the Criminal Procedure Code is urgently amended in compliance with the Constitutional Court decisions, so that the most serious criminal investigations may continue to be conducted with all the appropriate means.

We strongly value the Mission's work in advancing gender equality, contributing to concrete impacts in the areas of combating domestic violence, implementing of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Gender Action Plan or developing municipal Roma Action Plan.

The European Union reiterates its unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. Whilst acknowledging that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina lists Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs as constituent peoples (along with Others), the EU reiterates that the principles of equality of all citizens and non-discrimination shall be fully warranted. We regret that a divisive rhetoric rooted in the past and an early electoral agenda have over the last months slowed down the pace of reforms and affected the political climate. We recall the importance of the country's commitment to the EU integration process and in this regard we welcome completing of the European Commission questionnaire in February 2018. We call on Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to engage in a meaningful reform process, not allowing the upcoming elections to completely halt much needed reforms. The politicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina have the responsibility to prevent a potential political crisis after the elections in October.

We once again express our strong support to the activities of the Mission and encourage the Mission to maintain continuity in its programmatic activities while preserving sufficient flexibility. Many challenges lay ahead of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Mission's support will certainly continue to be much needed. In conclusion, let me thank Ambassador Berton and his able staff for their work on the ground.

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 align themselves with this statement.

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