



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1248 Vienna, 21 November 2019

EU Statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Borchardt

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, and thanks him for presenting the Report of the OSCE Presence in Albania to the Permanent Council.

Over the past two decades, the OSCE Presence has been contributing to the positive evolution of Albania in partnership with the country's institutions. We greatly appreciate Albania's commitment to cooperate with the OSCE Presence and we encourage the Government to continue this work across the three dimensions.

We welcome that the Presence contributed to support the ongoing justice, administrative, and electoral reforms, in accordance with specific requests received from relevant interlocutors and identified institutional needs. The EU recognises the OSCE PiA's important role in all key priority reform areas for the country, including reform of the judiciary, fight against corruption, fight against crime and protection of human rights.

We welcome that the Presence contributed to the improvement of democratic practice in Albania by continuing its decades-long support for the Assembly, including by helping to strengthen its institutional and administrative capacity and its capacity to organize public consultations, promote gender equality and improve its communication and transparency.

We appreciate the Presence's continuous assistance in the fight against corruption, especially the support given to the National Coordinator against Corruption (NCAC) in conducting an external mid-term evaluation of the Inter-Sectorial Strategy against Corruption.

The European Union appreciates the continued focus of the Presence on the implementation of a comprehensive justice reform in Albania. We also commend the continuous direct legislative assistance offered to the law-making bodies in order to ensure a transparent, inclusive, and well-coordinated law-making process in Albania.

We welcome the continuous support provided by the Presence to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, whose headquarters are located in Tirana. We commend OSCE and RYCO for having joined forces in order to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among youth in the region and look forward to continued cooperation.

We welcome the intensive work done in the Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform of the Assembly of Albania and urge extra-parliamentary opposition to contribute with proposals to this crucial reform effort. Furthermore, we encourage the Presence to continue to work for a consensual solution that needs the active participation of all parties involved.

We welcome the Presence's sustained efforts in supporting Albania to continue its partnerships with international stakeholders in the field of border management and fight against transnational threats. The EU appreciates the meetings organized between Albania and other regional stakeholders, with the support of the Presence, aimed at addressing common issues affecting regional security, such as irregular migration, drug trafficking, and smuggling.

The EU encourages Albania to fully commit to combating all forms of trafficking in human beings and welcomes the National Action Plan, the legal procedures to identify children in economic exploitation, and the guidelines for labour inspectors to detect child labour, all developed with the technical support of the Presence. We commend the training of 60 judges and prosecutors on the new anti-trafficking legislation, and also the development of new procedures by the Presence and UNHCR for the treatment of irregular migrants.

We fully support Albania's fight against environmental crime, we commend the amendments made to the Criminal Code on the criminalization of illegal acts against human health and the environment, and the efforts in developing environmental law.

The European Union highly appreciates Albania's reinforced approach in addressing the threat of international terrorism and countering violent extremism and radicalization. The outreach meetings meant to establish referral mechanisms to help individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization, held by the National Coordination Centre on CVE with the support of the Presence, are warmly welcomed by the EU.

We welcome OSCE's leadership and partnership on media freedom and we commend the Presence monitoring of the evolution of the two draft laws on media and anti-defamation, as well as its close cooperation with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. This support for Albania's effort to align media legislation to recognized international standards is commendable. Good media legislation could become a model for the whole region and beyond – and a great success of the incoming Albanian Chairmanship.

The reform of the Albanian justice system remains crucial as part of the government's efforts to fulfil its OSCE commitments and also to align the country with European standards. The results we have seen this year in the vetting process are encouraging. The founding of the new justice self-governing institutions at the end of 2018 is an important milestone. This could contribute to the resumption of work of the

Constitutional Court (CC) which remains without a quorum as well as to the functioning of the High Court which still needs to be staffed with a proper number of vetted judges. We are convinced that the reform of the justice system will be transformative for other areas too, including anti-corruption and fight against drug smuggling and cultivation, while increasing the trust of society in democracy and democratic practice. We commend the contribution of the OSCE Presence in the process of substantial reform of the justice sector and we would welcome the prompt appointment of the new judges.

The EU encourages Albania to continue its good cooperation with the International Monitoring Operation, and to build on the progress achieved so far. The EU welcomes the efforts towards establishing a solid track record of pro-active investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in the fight against corruption and organised crime, while taking note that dismantling organised crime groups remains an important challenge and an essential long-term objective. We stress the importance for Albania to pursue its current, positive engagement in countering cultivation and trafficking of drugs, with the aim of obtaining further tangible results in this specific area.

The EU reiterates the need for effective legislative and policy measures to reinforce the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies, including the equal treatment of all minorities and access to rights for persons belonging to them throughout Albania, and to ensure consistent implementation of the framework law by addressing in relevant bylaws all outstanding issues, including the right to free self-identification, as well as the need for efficient implementation of property rights.

The EU strongly commends Albania's continued full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The EU welcomes Albania's continued engagement in regional cooperation, while noting that intensified dialogue with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations remains essential.

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

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH 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 the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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