



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1381 Vienna, 7 July 2022

EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Del Monaco back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for presenting his comprehensive report.
2. Against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms as a gross violation of international law, the UN Charter and OSCE principles and commitments, the role of OSCE and its field operations continue to be imperative in promoting and safeguarding security and stability across the OSCE area. Albania's unequivocal condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine is testimony to its strong commitment to the European values we share. We strongly commend Albania's full alignment with all EU CFSP declarations, statements and restrictive measures. We also welcome our intensified cooperation in other multilateral and regional organisations, including in the UN, where Albania is a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2022-2023.
3. We congratulate the Presence on the 25th anniversary of its establishment and applaud its work, which continues to be relevant, effective, and carefully tailored to the country's priority needs. Over the years, the OSCE Presence in Albania has made an important contribution to fostering peace, security and the economic development of Albania. The EU very much welcomes Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence and encourages the continuation and development of meaningful projects across the three Dimensions. We also acknowledge the ongoing and long-standing co-operation between the Presence

and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania and encourage further strengthening of this beneficial partnership.

4. We welcome the cross-dimensional, whole-of-society approach followed by the Presence and its priorities, its engagement at central and local levels, its partnership with the Albanian institutions, and its efforts to mainstream gender, youth and regional perspectives across programmes, in complementarity and cooperation with international partners. We encourage the Presence to continue to enhance its work on gender equality in programme development and implementation across all three dimensions.
5. The EU also welcomes Albania's continued constructive engagement in regional cooperation, as well as the intensified dialogue with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential.
6. We also commend the support provided by the Presence in a number of areas of strategic relevance for the host country, such as advancing democracy and governance; enhancing the rule of law and justice reform; combating crime and corruption; and ensuring strengthened representation in decision-making processes for women, youth and civil society.
7. The EU welcomes the Presence's activities in the first dimension, and its dedicated and comprehensive efforts to support the country in tackling serious and organised crime, preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism and in enhancing security and safety mechanisms at the local level. We also welcome the Presence's contribution to address trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the region, and we recall our support for the implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of SALW in the Western Balkans by 2024.
8. We also welcome the Presence's contribution to strengthening the rule of law and the justice system. We look forward to continued cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania in the context of the implementation of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project. Regarding the vetting process of the judiciary, we welcome

the approval by the Assembly of a constitutional amendment in February 2022, extending the mandate of the internationally independent vetting bodies, supported by the EU, until the end of 2024.

9. We welcome the Presence's active role and fruitful partnership with the EU Delegation in Albania on media freedom. We recall the importance of promoting and protecting free and independent media and ensuring the independence and impartiality of the main media regulatory body. We also stress the importance of respecting the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, and media pluralism in the country and call for zero tolerance towards instances of violence and intimidation against journalists and accountability for the perpetrators.
10. We also underline the good cooperation between the Presence and the Central Election Commission (CEC) in particular in enhancing its capacity to organise and administer the electoral process, an important part of the electoral reform process.
11. The EU emphasises the importance of activities aimed at strengthening the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, media development and combating human trafficking. We reiterate the need to continue the activities aimed at promoting effective policies concerning the protection of rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and promoting the improvement of the legal framework in this regard, to address the gaps that have been identified. Furthermore, we call for the swift adoption of the bylaws to the framework law on national minorities, namely on the right to free self-identification, which has been significantly delayed, as well as for the full protection of property rights. We underline the importance of the population census this autumn, particularly with regard to persons belonging to national minorities.
12. The EU reaffirms its commitment to enlargement, which remains a key policy of the European Union. The EU expresses its full and unequivocal commitment to the European membership perspective of the Western Balkans, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits. We look forward to the official start of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia as soon as possible.

13. Finally, we remain committed to supporting the efficient implementation of the mandate of the Presence and we would like to wish Ambassador Del Monaco and his able team every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of TÜRKIYE, the REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA* and MONTENEGRO*, 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 and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOV, align themselves with this statement.

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