



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 943
Vienna, 7 March 2013**

**EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the
OSCE Mission to Montenegro, H.E. Ambassador L'ubomir
Kopaj**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Ambassador L'ubomir Kopaj to the Permanent Council for the first time in his capacity as Head of the OSCE Mission in Montenegro. We thank him for his comprehensive report and wish him a successful mandate.

The European Union welcomes the progress Montenegro has made towards European integration, marked by the opening of the accession negotiations in June 2012. Positive results have been achieved in key areas, also with the assistance of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro. Further efforts will be needed in particular concerning the negotiation chapters on judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security, which – in line with the new approach - will be at the heart of the negotiation process. Progress in the negotiations will be determined by Montenegro's pace of reforms and achievements.

We highly value Montenegro's constructive approach towards regional cooperation and stability in the Western Balkans. The EU encourage the government of Montenegro to maintain the reform momentum and make use of it both to advance towards its goal of EU membership and to modernise the country at the same time.

We commend the OSCE Mission for the valuable and effective assistance it has provided to the host country throughout the past years within its broad mandate. We appreciate the Mission's coordination with other international actors in the host country complementing each other and appreciate the fruitful cooperation between the Mission and the Montenegrin authorities. The Mission should also look for opportunities to cooperate with other OSCE Missions on region-wide issues.

We value the Mission's efforts to address security threats and reiterate our continuing support for the MONDEM Demilitarization Programme. We are pleased to learn that the preparations for the next phase of ammunition demilitarisation have begun. We note Montenegro's continuous efforts to building security in the whole region including its own ongoing defence reform, engaging in the spirit of the OSCE commitments and its bilateral defence agreements with its neighbours.

We commend the Mission for having advanced the police reform and for planning further support in strengthening police and border-police regional cooperation, taking into account that combating organised crime, corruption, drug crime and trafficking in human beings remain major challenges for the country. Every effort should be made to assist the Montenegrin authorities to combat these threats to stability, in close coordination with other international actors, particularly the EU.

We acknowledge the importance of the Mission's attention to environmental protection and security, including improving economic environment in the country, good governance and preventing money laundering. We appreciate the support to strengthening the environmental regulatory system and support given to the Aarhus Centres.

The European Union highly values the Mission's excellent work in promoting democratisation, capacity building of the Parliament, improving the effectiveness of local self-government and improving the environment for civil society, as well as the involvement of youth in the decision-making process. We welcome the activities of the Mission aimed at promoting gender equality and preventing domestic violence. We commend the Mission for supporting durable solutions for displaced persons and implementation of regional best practices for Roma integration, also in the framework of the regional project BPRI funded by the EU.

We recognise that the Mission played an important advisory role in the process of reforms in the area of rule of law and human rights. Further reform efforts and in particular sustainable reform implementation as well as the development of a solid track record in particular with regard to the fight against organised crime and corruption, will be needed. Also further efforts are required to ensure the accountability and independence of the judiciary, including finalising the ongoing

constitutional reform in this field in line with the Venice Commission recommendations and European standards.

The European Union strongly supports efforts to promote a free and vibrant media sector in Montenegro, as well as to ensure the safety of journalists. We welcome the adoption of the new Law on Free Access to Information. We encourage the Mission to continue to provide assistance in this field, including through utilising the expertise of the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Presidential elections will take place in Montenegro on 7 April. We expect that the Montenegrin authorities will address the remaining challenges and implement key recommendations made in previous reports by OSCE/ODIHR, including the accuracy of the voter lists, the ban on recruitment to temporary positions in the public sector when elections are called, the oversight of campaign finances and the review of complaints.

In conclusion, we would like to thank once again Ambassador Kopaj and assure him and his able team of the EU's continued support and wish further success.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia 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.