



**EUROPEAN UNION**

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1220  
Vienna, 14 March 2019**

**EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the  
OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Orizio**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Orizio to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report on the activities of the OSCE Mission to Serbia over the past year.

We highly value the important support the Mission provides to Serbia in its core mandated areas of rule of law, democratisation and the media, police reform and combating organised crime. We also value the spirit of genuine cooperation with the host country and its efforts to develop partnerships with all stakeholders and promote both domestic ownership and regional cooperation.

We take note of the Government's pledge to address issues regarding the enhancement of the rule of law and the judicial reform, including the necessary constitutional amendments aiming at the independence, accountability and efficiency of the judiciary and we encourage the Government to continue along this path. We expect an inclusive and transparent process, the outcome of which meets high international standards. In that regard, we commend the Mission's focus on this highly important issue and its efforts to facilitate ongoing discussions, including by involving civil society and international experts, and we encourage Serbia to build on this process.

We note with concern that despite the appointment of the new War Crimes Prosecutor and the promulgation of the War Crimes Prosecution Strategy 2018-2023, the pace of processing relevant cases remains slow, as reported by the Mission. We underline the need to intensify reform efforts and to deliver convincing results, to fight impunity for war crimes and ensure the victim's rights and their access to justice without discrimination. We stress the importance of

handling of war crimes, including by avoiding conflicts of jurisdictions. We also reiterate that due attention to finding and identifying the fate of missing persons, who disappeared in the 1990s conflicts, should be maintained. We stress the importance of meaningful regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations as a prerequisite for stability, lasting reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and overcoming legacies of the past. In this context, we appreciate the Mission's work in monitoring war crimes proceedings, in the framework of the relevant EU funded project, and its efforts in providing training for those who work in such cases and in raising awareness of war crimes, in particular among the youth.

We acknowledge the steps taken and encourage further efforts to enhance the legal framework for the fight against corruption and we underline the importance of effective implementation leading to tangible results. We value the Mission's assistance to Serbia in this field, in particular in terms of providing training and facilitating the transfer of international expertise. In the same context, we commend the Mission's work in support of efforts to develop international and regional synergies in combating organised crime, which constitutes one of the most serious challenges for the wider region, and other transnational threats, such as money laundering, international terrorism financing, smuggling of firearms, trafficking of human beings, cybercrime, extremism and radicalization. Regarding the scourge of trafficking of human beings, we commend the Mission's assistance to Serbia in implementing its relevant national Strategy through a victim oriented approach, with a special focus on women and children. We further welcome the cooperation established last September between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Serbia. We welcome the Mission's engagement in the area of security sector governance and reform (SSG/R).

We strongly encourage the host country to ensure consistent implementation of fundamental rights across Serbia, especially to improve conditions for the full exercise of the freedom of expression. We commend the Mission's continued focus on Human Dimension issues, in particular on tolerance and non-discrimination and combating hate crimes. We highly value the broad range of activities implemented by the Mission during the reporting period. Cases of hate speech, intimidation and attacks should be addressed promptly and firmly.

We underline the importance of respecting and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, as well as ensuring non-discriminatory treatment, in line with international standards and commitments and bilateral agreements pertaining to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. This is of particular importance in relation to education, the use of languages, access to media and religious services in minority languages and representation in public administration and representative bodies at all levels. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of amendments to two important laws, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities and the Law on the National Minority Councils, revising and enhancing the relevant legal framework. We praise the Mission's contribution to these developments, in cooperation with the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and its continuous engagement, throughout Serbia, with minority communities, by providing assistance in capacity building and monitoring the functioning of the National Minority Councils for the purpose they serve without undue political interference. We particularly praise the Mission's attention both to the right to study in the mother tongue and acquiring proficiency in the state language.

We note persisting challenges in the sphere of media freedom and we are looking forward to those shortcomings being addressed in the new Media Strategy, which we expect to meet high international standards and commitments. We also recall the Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists and strongly encourage the host country to take all necessary measures to improve the safety of journalists. We recall the importance of supporting independent media and investigative journalism. We commend the Mission's support in the area of media freedom in cooperation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We appreciate the focus on youth throughout the Mission's activities, in particular at local level by promoting youth activism in highly relevant topics such as human rights, gender equality and environmental awareness. We also value the Mission's engagement with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office which serves to build bridges among the regional youth and we encourage Serbian representatives to participate in future meetings of the RYCO governing board. We would welcome information by Serbia why it took the decision to withdraw its

youth representative from the board of the RYCO.

We note with appreciation that the gender perspective is taken into consideration in many of the Mission's initiatives and we would appreciate more information on efforts for gender mainstreaming across its activities.

We continue to encourage the Mission to further embed a culture of evaluation in its operations and continue its cooperation with other OSCE field operations as well as with other relevant international stakeholders in order to avoid duplication of efforts, make full use of lessons learned and promote connectivity among youth, women and civil society.

We reiterate EU's commitment to Serbia's European perspective and its readiness to support Serbia in advancing its reform agenda and in tackling the remaining challenges. In that regard, we welcome the overall progress, with the opening of four additional EU negotiating chapters, and we encourage further and more focused efforts on effective implementation and sustainable track record of reforms in the identified key areas.

We recall that progress in the EU facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is a key requirement for both in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region. Therefore, we urge both sides to redouble their efforts to engage constructively in this process.

We wish Ambassador Orizio and his able team every success in their efforts for this year.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE.

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