



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1224 Vienna, 4 April 2019

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 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 we encourage the Mission to continue with appropriate, flexible and tailor-made engagement of its unique wide field presence. We commend the increased co-operation between the Mission and the EU Delegation/Special Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We especially welcome activities in the areas of rule of law, education, safety of journalists, war crimes cases processing, Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R), Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), arms control, preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism (P/C VERLT), cyber security, freedom of media and expression, as well as combating hate speech, promotion of tolerance, reconciliation, inter-religious dialogue, and support to the Ombudsman Institution (OI).

The adoption and implementation of reforms is urgently needed particularly in the areas of rule of law, public administration and the fight against corruption as well as socio-economic reforms. It is all the more important that the Mission keeps or

even strengthens its activities in those fields where it can bring added value. Intensified regional outreach and wider regional co-operation in areas like human rights or trafficking in human beings also help to bring concrete and more sustainable results.

We reiterate the EU's unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. Following the elections on 7 October 2018, and recalling the Conclusions of June 2018, the EU expects all leaders to engage constructively on government formation at all levels, in the interests of all citizens. We urge the BiH authorities to prioritise taking forward the reforms needed to advance on its EU path, ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Reform Agenda. We encourage the host country to amend the Electoral Framework, in line with findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission issued after the general elections held in October 2018, and the relevant judgements of the Constitutional Court of BiH and the European Court of Human Rights. Election related issues should be addressed according to European standards. We welcome the Mission's support in this area and acknowledge the importance of inclusive engagement between the Mission and relevant international and local stakeholders.

Inclusive, non-discriminatory and high 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 the Mission There also needs to be more effort to make the education system more inclusive and to use education as a tool to promote reconciliation and, in this context to address the continuing existence of the 'two schools under one roof' phenomenon in the Federation. This is without prejudice to the right of education in the language of choice in accordance with the applicable legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We commend the Mission's assistance in addressing the backlog of war crimes cases through concrete practical steps like provision of training and workshops, through monitoring of court proceedings and 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 enhancing cyber security as well as preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism and we would like to hear Amb. Berton's insights on this. We appreciate the support provided to a number of youth-led activities including the Youth Advisory Group which has served as a model for the region. We would like to see increased co-operation with the Regional Youth Co-operation Office (RYCO).

We appreciate that in order to further the fight against corruption, the Mission supported the development, implementation, and promotion of key anti-corruption legislation and policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We urge the host country's authorities at all levels to resume the legislative process on the draft BiH Law on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest, further strengthen the capacities of the Central Election Commission to monitor the compliance with political party financing regulations, amend the legislation in order to establish an efficient mechanism to check the accuracy of asset declarations at all levels, complete the legislative framework on whistle-blowers protection at Federal level, as well as fulfill the outstanding GRECO and ODIHR Recommendations as regards to the Law on Political Party financing.

We strongly value the Mission's work on advancing gender equality, contributing to concrete impacts in the areas of combating domestic violence – also as a follow up to the Milan Ministerial Council's decision on preventing and combating violence against women –or developing local Roma Action Plans. We are concerned by deterioration of media freedom in the country and encourage the Mission to expand its activities in this field, following up on the Milan Ministerial Council's decision on safety of journalists.

We recall the importance of the country's commitment to the EU integration process and in this regard we take note of the recent submission of the European Commission questionnaire.

National reconciliation is often challenged. How do you assess the current situation? What can be done to strengthen the efforts for interethnic reconciliation in BiH?

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.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA* and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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