



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1469 Vienna, 18 April 2024

EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Kilian Wahl

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Wahl back to the Permanent Council and expresses gratitude for his comprehensive annual report on the Mission's activities.
2. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has shaken the foundations of the European security order thus further aggravating existing security challenges and threats across the OSCE region. Russia's war of aggression has negative political, security, economic, environmental and human rights consequences for the entire OSCE area and beyond.
3. We commend North Macedonia for its active role during its Chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2023 and its efforts to ensure the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments. The EU welcomes North Macedonia's strategic commitment to its EU path, in particular its full alignment with the EU CFSP, including on EU restrictive measures. In anticipation of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in April and May 2024, the EU expects all political forces to place EU integration at the forefront of their agendas and prioritise EU-related reforms.

4. The EU highly values the work carried out by the OSCE Mission to Skopje as a trusted partner both for host country institutions and beneficiaries, as well as the international community. We also acknowledge the mission's support in facilitating OSCE-related events within the country during the 2023 Chairpersonship.
5. In the Human Dimension, we fully support the Mission's continuous efforts to promote constructive inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion, including with youth organisations. We welcome especially the community outreach of the Head of Mission, including persons belonging to the Roma community, and the creation of the Bitola Task Force, which contributed to the relationship between them and police forces. The EU commends the Mission's work on media policy with a special focus on freedom of the media and safety of journalists. We appreciate the Mission's pivotal role in establishing better understanding of the 2019 hate crime legislation and in establishing national networks against hate speech in the media and against hate crime.
6. We appreciate the Mission's activities to foster parliamentary democracy, public administration reform, and promote the rule of law, including the Mission's new partnership with the constitutional court and efforts to strengthen judicial independence. We welcome the Mission's recalibrated approach to working with the rule-of-law actors and judicial institutions, focusing on a series of strategic and interconnected efforts that constitute a more comprehensive approach to strengthening the entire criminal justice system.
7. We welcome the Mission's support to North Macedonia in drafting the new Criminal Code and amending the Law on Criminal Procedure and reiterate the importance of strengthening trust in the justice system and addressing corruption unabatedly, including through a solid track record in the investigation, prosecution and final conviction of high-level corruption cases. In this context, the EU looks forward to continued cooperation with the Mission on the implementation of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project.

8. With regard to the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, we commend the Mission's support to electoral reforms and the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Civil Registry, enabling the late registration of unregistered persons in North Macedonia.
9. The EU also welcomes the Mission's organisation of a Regional Gender & Security Conference in Skopje with ODIHR in March this year, bringing together regional law enforcement agencies to exchange experiences and best practices in achieving gender equality within law enforcement.
10. In the Politico-Military dimension, we greatly appreciate the Mission's sustained support in the fight against corruption, organised crime, threats to cybersecurity, financial and environmental offenses, domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, and its efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorism. We commend its work to modernise the police forces, bolster regional cooperation in border management, and its assistance on Small Arms and Light Weapons.
11. We encourage the Mission to continue its work on environmental issues, particularly in support of the OSCE project on climate change and security, and to broaden environmental awareness in cooperation with the Aarhus Centre and other relevant stakeholders.
12. We reaffirm the EU's full and unequivocal commitment to the European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans and reiterate our unwavering support for the European integration of the region, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits, which is in our mutual interest. We fully support the Western Balkans partners' reaffirmed commitment to inclusive regional cooperation and strengthening of good neighbourly relations, including with EU Member States.

13. We believe that the EU accession process could provide numerous opportunities for the Mission to support reforms in areas of national priority that align with OSCE commitments.

14. Finally, we wish you, Ambassador Wahl, and your able team every success in the coming year.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and GEORGIA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.