

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE  
REPORT OF THE MISSION TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Delivered by Ambassador Anne- Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 25 March 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chair,

I would also like to welcome Ms. Kavalec to the Permanent Council and thank her for her report and presentation here today. Please let me express my deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of your staff member, who tragically died from Covid-19.

Norway sees the Field Operations as one of the key assets of the OSCE, as they provide tailored and dedicated support to the participating States

The relations between Norway and Bosnia and Herzegovina are strong. Norway remains an active partner, both bilaterally and within the OSCE. We will continue to support reforms that increase stability and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Balkans and in Europe.

Significant progress has been achieved, but continued reforms are necessary to secure stability and welfare for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is also a prerequisite for further European integration. Reform in the area of rule of law remains a fundamental challenge that needs to be addressed. A vibrant civil society and an independent press are keys to continued democratic and economic development. The OSCE mission plays an important role in supporting reform efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We commend Bosnia and Herzegovina on the peaceful and orderly conduct of the 2020 local elections, even in the difficult times of a pandemic. It was of utmost importance that the citizens of Mostar could participate in local elections for the first time since 2008.

Madame Chair,

The report we have read describes an extremely broad set of activities implemented at both local and national levels by the Mission in collaboration with local and national governmental structures. The mission has promoted efforts against discrimination, trafficking, corruption, hate crime and terrorism, and supported efforts towards equal education, gender equality, good governance, inclusion, and fundamental freedoms. Reconciliation and trust building activities, and projects within such realms as environmental matters and disaster- risk reduction are also on the list, as well as cybersecurity, youth issues and more.

In this regard, we wonder whether such a broad approach as that described for the Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, results in its capacities being spread relatively thin. In light of the financial situation in the organisation and its missions, we wonder if there is potential to concentrate the efforts more. I would kindly ask for Ms. Kavalec's reflections on this point

Of all these activity areas, let me highlight a few:

The Norwegian embassy in Sarajevo cooperates closely with the Mission, for example in the area of education. We are encouraged by the progress made in the past year, particularly the formal cooperation between several ministries and the OSCE on issues of curriculum reform. We look forward to following this work further.

Reforms of the election laws will remain a key issue in 2021, and the Mission's continued support to the Central Election Commission is important. We also welcome its efforts which reportedly resulted in a reduced level of divisive rhetoric in the local election campaigns last year.

We look forward to future updates on results of the new cooperation between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament, the Mission and ODIHR, to improve legislative processes.

Countering corruption is important in its own right, but also to achieve the goal of countering and preventing transnational threats and organised crime. We therefore appreciate the Mission's efforts to assist with anti-corruption activities both at district, cantonal and municipal levels, and in light of the special challenges brought on by the pandemic.

We welcome the Mission's cooperation with several partners on arms control, ammunition and weapons storage and disposal. We are concerned that security sector reform and border management activities seem to have been hampered or delayed by lacking political will.

Madame Chair,

The report gives a good overview of activities related to gender-based violence and discrimination, the Women, Peace and Security agenda and women's political participation. It is our hope that the now one year old Gender Action Plan of the Mission, as well as the focus on training for gender liaisons, will ensure gender mainstreaming into all activities of the Mission, and that this will be evident in future reporting to this Council.

We thank the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina for its willingness to address certain challenges to the work in its report. Norway has asked for this type of information from the Heads of Missions several times, as we find that it increases the understanding we as participating States have for the work of the Missions.

Thank you