



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1269 Vienna, 28 May 2020

EU Statement in response to 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 for the last time in his capacity as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and thank him for his comprehensive report.

We commend the Mission for its targeted efforts, under the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide immediate assistance in particular to the most vulnerable groups, and to closely monitor the state of emergency introduced by the Government and its impact on the functioning of democratic institutions, human rights, the rule of law and the freedom of media.

We highly value the significant support the Mission provides to Serbia, the climate of fruitful cooperation it has established with the host country, its continuous efforts to develop partnerships with all stakeholders and promote domestic ownership and regional cooperation.

We welcome the host Government's pledge to address issues regarding the enhancement of the rule of law and judicial reform, including the necessary constitutional amendments aiming at the independence, accountability and efficiency of the judiciary. We expect that the process for the relevant constitutional amendments will be promptly resumed after the upcoming parliamentary elections and that the outcome will meet high international standards. We commend the Mission's focus on this highly important issue.

In view of the upcoming parliamentary elections, we stress the need for free and fair elections to be conducted fully in line with international standards and commitments, including the need for genuinely free and independent media. We welcome the invitation for election observation extended by the Serbian authorities to ODIHR and we look forward to receiving information on ODIHR's plans in this respect. Meaningful monitoring of the elections by ODIHR would be important.

We note the Government's initiatives to improve, in cooperation with ODIHR, the election process and we encourage the full implementation of all relevant recommendations. We also note amendments to electoral legislation regarding the electoral threshold and the election of national minorities' representatives. In this regard, we took note of the concerns raised in the Mission's report and in particular the possible impact on free self-identification for persons belonging to national minorities. The process of implementation needs to be followed closely.

We also appreciate the Mission's continuing work in monitoring war crimes proceedings, in the framework of the relevant EU funded project. We note with concern that the pace of processing relevant cases remains slow. We underline the need to intensify reform efforts, to fight impunity for war crimes and ensure the victims' rights and their access to justice without discrimination. We stress the importance of tackling war crimes, including by resolving conflicts of jurisdiction. We reiterate that due attention to the fate of missing persons, who disappeared in the 1990s conflicts, should be maintained. We stress the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations as a prerequisite for stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and overcoming legacies of the past.

We acknowledge the host Government's efforts to fight corruption and we welcome the adoption of new important legislation. We continue however to underline the importance of effective implementation leading to tangible results. We highly appreciate the Mission's assistance to Serbia in this field. We also commend the Mission's work in promoting international and regional synergies in combating organised crime and other transnational threats, including money laundering, international terrorism financing, smuggling of firearms, trafficking of human beings, cybercrime, violent extremism and radicalization.

We commend the Mission for supporting the Serbian Ministry of Interior in the implementation of its Action Plan on SALW control, and for assisting with an awareness-raising campaign on SALW control in Serbia. These activities are a

valuable contribution to the Regional Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of SALW and their Ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024.

We strongly encourage the host country to ensure consistent implementation of human rights across Serbia, especially to improve conditions for the full exercise of the freedom of expression. We appreciate the Mission's continued focus on human rights protection and highly value the broad range of its activities during the reporting period.

We note with appreciation that the gender perspective is taken into consideration in many of the Mission's initiatives.

We appreciate the focus on youth throughout the Mission's activities, in particular at local level by promoting youth activism in highly relevant topics. It is essential that the OSCE and RYCO join forces to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among youth in the region.

We underline that Serbia needs to continue to pay particular attention to full respect for fundamental rights, including protection of the most vulnerable groups, as well as the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, in line with the international standards and bilateral agreements. This is particularly important in the areas of education and the right to study in their mother tongue, use of minority languages, and access to media and religious services in minority languages and representation in public administration and representative bodies. The proper functioning of National Minority Councils, without undue political interference, remains important for their activity and purpose they serve and should continue to be closely monitored by the HCNM. Cases of hate speech, intimidation and attacks should be addressed promptly and firmly. We reiterate our call for effective implementation of the relevant strategic documents. In this context, we commend the Mission's contribution and its continuous engagement with organisations of national minorities, including providing assistance in capacity building.

We welcome the adoption of the new Media Strategy and we commend the Mission for its key role in facilitating its drafting. We share the Mission's assessment that a new Action Plan and legislative measures are crucial for the meaningful implementation of the Strategy and for addressing the persisting challenges and shortcomings. We also strongly encourage the host country to take all necessary measures to improve the safety of journalists.

We reiterate the EU's unequivocal support to Serbia's European perspective and its readiness to assist Serbia in advancing its reform agenda and in tackling the remaining challenges. In that regard, we welcome the overall progress, with the opening of two 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 each in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region, which was most recently reaffirmed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit of the 6th of May and the Zagreb Declaration. Therefore, we urge both sides to redouble their efforts, with the support of EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak, to engage constructively in this process.

We would like to thank Ambassador Orizio for all his dedicated and efficient work as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia over the last four years and wish him every success in his future endeavours. We are confident that the Mission will continue its commendable work.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN align themselves with this statement.

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