



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1316 Vienna, 27 May 2021

EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Clemens Koja

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Clemens Koja to the Permanent Council and thank him for his timely and comprehensive report. The EU highly values the work carried out by the OSCE Mission in Skopje.

We recall that, according to OSCE/ODIHR, the early parliamentary elections which took place on 15 July last year in the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic were generally well run and candidates could campaign freely, but legal stability was undermined by significant revisions to the legal framework and subsequent government decrees. We encourage the authorities to address the remaining OSCE/ODIHR recommendations ahead of the next election cycle.

We welcome the progress that has been made by the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as the government's commitment to sustain and accelerate the implementation of EU-related reforms. We take positive note of the ambitious "Europe at Home" agenda. We welcome in particular the adoption of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. We encourage all parties to further advance the reform agenda and to improve constructive dialogue. We call on the authorities to continue to deliver on the country's EU commitments.

The European Union reiterates its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and will continue to support the Republic of North Macedonia on

its path to the EU and looks forward to the holding of the first Intergovernmental Conference as soon as possible. We also recall the importance of achieving tangible results and implementing bilateral agreements fully, consistently and in good faith, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria, as part of the enlargement process.

The EU has supported the Western Balkans in their efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and we will continue to do so, both with regard to the socio-economic impact of the crisis and to the vaccination campaign. The EU is one of the biggest contributors to COVAX, which is foreseen to provide vaccines for around 20% of the population. In addition, we have recently started delivering the first of almost 120,000 vaccine doses for the Republic of North Macedonia fully financed by the EU. We commend the Mission for its COVID-19 Response Fund to mitigate the social-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for the most vulnerable persons and would be interested in hearing more about this innovative tool.

We welcome the Mission's intention to continue its focus on human rights and fundamental freedoms, and on tolerance and non-discrimination, including the implementation of the laws on prevention of discrimination and hate crime. We welcome the continued activities of the mission supporting the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, promoting a multi-ethnic society and advancing constructive inter-ethnic relations, by paying special attention to promoting integrative policies, including in the area of education and youth participation. We also appreciate the focus on the most vulnerable communities, including Roma.

We fully support the inclusion of gender considerations into the mission's policy dialogue with host authorities, mainstreaming gender equality into all of its programmatic work and developing targeted actions for women's empowerment.

We share your assessment that it is important for the Mission to continue its work on media policy, with particular focus on the important issues of freedom of media, safety of journalists and media literacy.

We fully support the Mission's continuous long-term efforts in promoting the rule of law, including extending its monitoring efforts and assistance in the implementation of the

National Judicial Reform Strategy. We welcome your active support to relevant national stakeholders in developing policies, including digitalisation, designed to improve the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of justice. We also appreciate the Mission's continued monitoring of trials and look forward to cooperating with you in the context of the EU project in this area.

We encourage the Mission to continue its support to the implementation of an inclusive and sustainable Reform of Public Administration. We appreciate your intention to continue your activities for strengthening the parliamentary oversight, democratic lawmaking and election management. We support your efforts to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability of local government.

As far as the Politico-Military Dimension is concerned, we highly appreciate the intention to support the host country's police reform with the aim of creating a professional and independent police service trusted by all citizens. The following topics also remain of high relevance to the EU: fighting financial crimes and corruption in all its forms, combatting transnational threats and organized crime, in particular in helping to implement the National Strategy on Countering Terrorism, countering the trafficking in human beings as well as in weapons, ammunition and explosives, addressing cyber-attacks, also strengthening regional cooperation and operational capacities for integrated border management.

The EU encourages the Mission to continue work on migration and on challenges like environmental degradation, competition over natural resources, the fight against corruption and its facilitation of trafficking in natural resources and climate change. We appreciate your support for the Aarhus centre and we believe that the Mission could use OSCE's expertise and networks to cooperate with relevant stakeholders with the aim of broadening environmental awareness.

Finally, we remain committed to supporting the Mission in its work and we would like to wish you and your able team every success.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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