



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1307 Vienna, 25 March 2021

EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Kavalec

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Kavalec back to the Permanent Council and thank her for the report on the Mission's activities. We strongly support the Mission's assistance to the host country at all levels. We underline the importance of co-operation and coordination with other relevant international stakeholders and we encourage the Mission to continue with its flexible and tailor-made engagement through its unique and wide field presence.

We stress the importance of the Mission's engagement in all three dimensions, as well as on cross-dimensional issues. We highly value the Mission's work in advancing gender equality and we encourage the Mission to mainstream gender in all Mission's activities. We appreciate the support provided to a number of youth-led activities and we welcome the strengthened partnership with the Regional Youth Co-operation Office (RYCO).

We commend the Mission for adapting its activities to the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring the safety of the Mission's staff. We welcome the Mission's increased work in the area of fundamental freedoms, despite the restrictions introduced in response to the pandemic. We appreciate the excellent work of the Mission in areas such as prevention of conflict of interest, public assembly, cyber security, education, war crimes processing and wider rule of law issues.

We encourage the host country to swiftly amend the electoral and constitutional framework, in line with ODIHR recommendations, and the relevant judgements of the European Court of Human Rights and Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to bring it in compliance with European standards. We welcome the Mission's continued engagement in this area, its support to the Central Election Commission as

well as the Mission's role in fostering a positive political dialogue ahead of the 2020 local elections. We recognize the historic importance of the local elections held in Mostar for the first time in twelve years.

Inclusive, non-discriminatory and high quality education persists as a challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus is rightly one of the key areas of the Mission's activities. We commend the active approach and the prominent role of 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 relevant legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We commend the Mission's assistance in addressing the backlog of war crimes cases through concrete, practical steps. An independent, professional and accountable judiciary, free from political influence is of the utmost importance for processing war crimes. In this regard, we welcome the adoption of the Revised National War Crimes Strategy in September 2020.

Last year, the 25th anniversary of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreements was marked. We welcome the Mission's increased engagement in the area of trust building and reconciliation. All actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina should urgently work towards reconciliation and building mutual trust and respect. Collective respect, recognition and remembrance can help to build a better future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU underlines that there is no space for the denial of genocide or war crimes, glorification of war criminals and historical revisionism in Europe or elsewhere.

On first dimension issues, the EU welcomes and encourages the Mission's engagement in the consolidation and enhancement of relevant capacities in the areas of cyber-security and arms control as well as in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

We also commend the Mission's plan to continue addressing environmental issues. We appreciate the Mission's activities in the fight against corruption and welcome the launch of the EU-funded regional trial monitoring project, which will be implemented by the OSCE field missions across the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will

strengthen the EU's support to the fight against organised crime and corruption in the region and assist the authorities to strengthen the rule of law.

We reiterate the EU's unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to make concrete progress in the implementation of the 14 priorities identified in the Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union. We welcome the adoption of the Strategic Framework on Public Administration Reform at all levels of government. We recall that Bosnia and Herzegovina should ensure effective coordination, at all levels, of border management and migration capacity, as well as ensure the functioning of the asylum system.

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

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

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