



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1291 Vienna, 26 November 2020

EU Statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Del Monaco to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for presenting the annual report of the OSCE Presence in Albania. We thank the OSCE Presence for its support to Albania, in particular during its successful OSCE Chairmanship in 2020, and welcome Albania's commitment to working closely with the Presence.

The Albanian leadership of the OSCE came at a challenging time. As described in Ambassador Del Monaco's report, the activities of the Presence this year were deeply affected by the aftermath of the 2019 earthquake and by the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend the Presence's risk-mitigation measures in order to ensure the safety of staff.

However, the year 2020 was also marked by the European Council's endorsement of the decision to open accession negotiations with Albania in line with the March 2020 Conclusions of the Council of the EU. The EU is looking forward to continuing the process by launching the first EU-Albania intergovernmental conference, as soon as all the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

We welcome that the OSCE Presence aligned its programmatic work in 2020 in accordance with the priorities of the Albanian Chairmanship, including activities

focused on youth, VERLT, corruption, combating all forms of trafficking, and good governance. This has contributed to increasing the public profile of the Presence's work in the country.

We also appreciate the Presence's important role in reform areas, including the fight against corruption and in the protection of human rights, including rights of persons belonging to minorities. In this respect, we reiterate the need for effective legislative and policy measures to reinforce the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies, including the equal treatment of all minorities and access to rights for persons belonging to them throughout Albania. Furthermore, we call for the swift adoption of the bylaws to the framework law on national minorities, namely on the right to free self-identification and on property rights, which has been significantly delayed.

We commend the contribution of the Presence in the reform of the justice sector and especially in areas such as tackling organized crime, promoting the rule of law, supporting the government's efforts to combat corruption, organized crime, cannabis cultivation and drug trafficking, as well as combating trafficking in human beings.

We welcome the Presence's role and partnership with the EU Delegation in Albania on media freedom as well as its close co-operation with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We welcome the Presence's important contribution to the process of electoral reform, providing technical expertise in close cooperation with ODIHR, and particularly for its contribution to the facilitation of dialogue and cooperation among the leading political parties. We take good note of the on-going work on electoral reform in line with ODIHR recommendations, as a direct result of the intensive work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform of the Assembly of Albania.

We appreciate the Presence's focus on co-operation with international organizations on election standards and management and its intention to continue working to support the Central Election Commission in implementing ODIHR's recommendations in close cooperation with the EU Delegation in Albania. This should contribute to the professionalization, independence and impartiality of the election administration to better prepare future elections, including those planned for April 2021.

We are also pleased with the Presence's lead role in supporting the work of the Parliament, in particular its timely assistance in adjusting its activities and move to online platforms during the pandemic.

We commend the Presence's emphasis on partnership with Albanian institutions in order to capitalise on its expertise and experience. We acknowledge the on-going and long-standing co-operation between the Presence and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania and encourage further strengthening of this beneficial partnership.

We attach importance to gender mainstreaming as a cross-dimensional issue and commend the Presence for its continued work in that regard, i.e. reinforce the capacities of women in politics, facilitate a national and regional exchange of experience and practice, and promote a wider public debate and understanding. We encourage the Presence to continue to enhance its work on gender equality, and to expand the role of its Youth Advisory Group to strengthen the voice of women and youth in its programme development and implementation across all three dimensions.

The EU also welcomes Albania's continued constructive engagement in regional cooperation. We also welcome that Albania has intensified dialogue with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential.

Finally, we reiterate our appreciation of the Presence's important positive role to the benefit of Albania and thank the whole team for their high-quality work, their excellent political and operational cooperation, and wish them every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and SERBIA*, 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 the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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