



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1442 Vienna, 21 September 2023

EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Acting Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bruce Berton

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Bruce Berton to the Permanent Council and thanks him for this comprehensive report.
2. Against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms, the role of the OSCE and its field operations continue to be imperative in promoting and safeguarding security and stability across the OSCE area. Albania's unequivocal condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine is testimony to its strong commitment to the European values we share. We commend Albania's full alignment with all EU CFSP declarations, statements and restrictive measures. We also welcome our intensified cooperation in other multilateral and regional organisations, including in the UN, where Albania has a very active engagement as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in promoting and defending the rules-based international order.
3. We congratulate the Presence for its continued and effective work across the three Dimensions, carefully tailored to the country's priority needs. We welcome its cross-dimensional, whole-of-society approach, its engagement at central and local levels, its partnership with the Albanian institutions, and its efforts to mainstream gender, youth and regional perspectives across programmes, in complementarity and cooperation

with international partners. The EU welcomes Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence. At the same time, we acknowledge the long-standing co-operation between the Presence and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania and encourage further strengthening of this beneficial partnership.

4. The EU notes Albania's continued engagement in regional cooperation, as well as the contacts with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential.
5. We commend the support provided by the Presence in a number of areas of key relevance for the host country, such as: enhancing the rule of law and support for the ongoing comprehensive justice reform; combating crime and corruption; promoting media freedom; and ensuring strengthened representation in decision-making processes for women, youth and civil society.
6. The EU welcomes the Presence's activities in the first dimension, and its dedicated and comprehensive efforts to support the country in tackling serious and organised crime, including through activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of the law enforcement agencies. We welcome the Presence's contribution to address trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the region, and we recall our support for the implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of SALW in the Western Balkans by 2024. At a time when Albania faced several major cyber incidents, we note that the Presence intensified its efforts in cyber security education and awareness.
7. We particularly welcome the Presence's contribution to strengthening the rule of law and supporting the ongoing comprehensive justice system, including the expanded assistance to the Constitutional Court. We commend Albania on the good progress overall made through the continued implementation of the justice reform, stressing the need for further progress. Securing solid and irreversible achievements, including in the area of rule of law, remains decisive for meeting the requirements of EU membership. We welcome that the vetting process has continued to advance steadily and produced

tangible results. We also welcome the extension of the constitutional mandate of the vetting bodies and encourages the authorities to ensure the orderly completion of the process in the shortest possible amount of time. We also welcome the support of the Presence to the anti-corruption efforts, in particular the focus on public procurement. The implementation of final court verdicts remain essential. We look forward to continued cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania in the context of the implementation of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project, within which the Presence monitored already 448 court hearings and produced two thematic interim reports with findings and recommendations.

8. We welcome the Presence's active role on promoting media freedom. While we note that Albania improved its press freedom according to the Media Freedom Index 2023, we recall the importance of media freedom and pluralism, of ensuring media independence and impartiality, as well as safety of journalists. We continue to call on Albania to make tangible progress on freedom of expression.
9. We also underline the activities of the Presence aimed at strengthening the election administration capacities, including the assistance to the Central Election Commission (CEC), and enhancing voter information. In this context, we underline the importance of addressing the implementation of outstanding OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.
10. The EU emphasises the importance of activities aimed at strengthening the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and combating trafficking in human beings. We note the technical expertise provided by the Presence in the process of adopting a new National Referral Mechanism (NRM), an important milestone in the development of the multi-agency framework in this area. We reiterate the need to continue the activities aimed at promoting effective policies concerning the protection of rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and promoting the improvement of the legal framework in this regard, to address the gaps that have been identified. Furthermore, we welcome the adoption of the secondary legislation on minorities and continue to urge Albania to swiftly adopt and implement the remaining by-laws relating to the 2017 framework law on the protection of national minorities. We also call for enhanced efforts to consolidate

property rights. We underline the importance of the ongoing population census, particularly with regard to persons belonging to national minorities, and we look forward to its smooth conduct, in full transparency and in line with international standards.

11. The EU reaffirms its commitment to enlargement, which remains a key policy of the European Union. The EU expresses its full and unequivocal commitment to the European membership perspective of the Western Balkans, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits.
12. We remain committed to supporting the efficient implementation of the mandate of the Presence and we would like to wish Ambassador Berton and his able team every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries TÜRKIYE, NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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