



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1195 Vienna, 27 September 2018

EU Statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Borchardt

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, and thanks him for presenting the Report of the OSCE Presence in Albania to the Permanent Council.

For more than twenty years, the OSCE Presence has continued to make very important contributions to developments in Albania. We very much welcome Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence and we encourage the Government to continue this work across the three dimensions.

We welcome that the Presence contributed to the improvement of democratic practice in Albania by continuing its decades-long support for the Assembly, including by helping to strengthen its institutional and administrative capacity and its capacity to organize public consultations, promote gender equality and improve its communication and transparency.

We also appreciate the work of the Presence in the areas of anti-corruption and tackling organized crime. Through the facilitation of dialogue between specialized institutions and civil society as well as through institutional capacity building to relevant institutions, for example through international exchange of experience, the Presence's role in furthering anti-corruption efforts, both in the public and private sectors, is highly commendable. We also welcome the Presence's support to the implementation of community policing.

We appreciate the Presence's continuous co-operation with international organizations on election standards and management and its intention to continue supporting the Central Election Commission in implementing ODIHR's recommendations contained in their election reports. This should contribute to the professionalization, independence and impartiality of the election administration in the preparation of future elections. The ongoing progress of electoral reform needs impetus and increased pace, given the upcoming local elections next year. The European Union is ready to offer support in this regard, including through an ODIHR-implemented regional project, which can contribute to supporting the implementation of these recommendations. Constructive discussions in the parliament would advance reform efforts.

We welcome the continuous support provided by the Presence to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, whose headquarters are located in Tirana. We commend OSCE and RYCO for having joined forces in order to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among youth in the region and look forward to continued cooperation.

We commend the Presence's successful handling of a complex portfolio of projects in many areas that are crucial for the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law in Albania - often with limited resources, but always in line with its mandate and addressing the needs it identifies jointly with the host country.

It is positive that the Presence is a focal point of experience and expertise in the area of media freedom, having a well-established and highly reputed track record of work in support of media professionalization, freedom of media and freedom of expression, media self-regulation and journalists' rights. In this context, the Presence and the EU are now building synergies: the Presence will implement an EU-funded project supporting the public broadcaster and the Faculty of Journalism of Tirana University.

We appreciate the continued focus of the Presence on evaluation, including the use of external evaluation. We would appreciate increased reporting on evaluation outcomes, based on key performance indicators

that have now been shared with participating States. We would also be grateful if you could further elaborate on the challenges the Presence faces in connection with the appreciation of the Albanian Lek against the Euro.

The reform of the Albanian justice system remains crucial as part of the government's efforts to fulfil its OSCE commitments and also to align the country with European standards. The first results we have seen this year in the vetting process are encouraging. On the other hand, there have been setbacks in establishing new justice self-governing institutions, due to the delays in the vetting process which in turn led to delays in setting up important specialized judicial institutions, affecting also the functioning of the Constitutional Court (CC), which remains without a quorum. We are convinced that the reform of the justice system will be transformative for other areas too, including anti-corruption and fight against drug smuggling and cultivation, while increasing the trust of society in democracy and democratic practice. We commend the contribution of the OSCE Presence in the process of substantial reform of the justice sector.

The EU encourages Albania to continue its good cooperation with the International Monitoring Operation, and to build on the progress achieved so far. The EU welcomes the efforts towards establishing a solid track record of pro-active investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in the fight against corruption and organised crime, while taking note that dismantling organised crime groups remains an important challenge and an essential long-term objective. We stress the importance for Albania to pursue its current, positive engagement in countering cultivation and trafficking of drugs, with the aim of obtaining further tangible results in this specific area.

The EU reiterates 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, and to ensure consistent implementation of the framework law by addressing in relevant

bylaws all outstanding issues, including the right to free self-identification, as well as the need for efficient implementation of property rights.

The EU strongly commends Albania's continued full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. The EU also welcomes the commitment and progress in fighting terrorism and countering violent extremism and encourages Albania to further pursue efforts in this direction. Important steps forward have also been made related to rule of law and countering religious intolerance.

We welcome the agreement for operational cooperation between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Albania. It will contribute to better management of irregular migration, further enhance security at the EU's external borders and strengthen the Agency's ability to act in the EU's immediate neighbourhood.

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

In view of progress on key priorities, the European Council has agreed to respond positively to the progress made by Albania and set out the path towards opening the accession negotiations in June 2019.

We welcome Albania's willingness to actively contribute to good international cooperation by presenting its candidature as OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.

In concluding, we would like to thank Ambassador Borchardt and his staff for their high-quality work and their excellent political and operational cooperation and wish them every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, 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 and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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