



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE
HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION IN SERBIA

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 28 May 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,

As others, we welcome Ambassador Andrea Orizio, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report.

Serbia continues to pursue its reform agenda. In this reporting period, Serbia has notably adopted a new Media Strategy. However, the Constitutional reform on judicial independence remains on hold. It is expected to resume after the parliamentary election, now to take place on 21 June. The OSCE Mission to Serbia deserves credit for its role in supporting Serbia's reform programme, including through the promotion of the rule of law, democracy, and other relevant OSCE principles and commitments..

When keeping a fast pace of reform, continuous attention to the quality of reform is important to secure the desired outcomes. Inclusive and consistent processes of consultation on draft laws improve quality and enable improved parliamentary oversight. This is important for all laws, but certainly no less important for those key laws, proposed in 2018, to ensure and safeguard the separation of powers.

The European experience has taught us that we must safeguard democracy to keep it strong. The continued, successful, but watchful progress of Serbia remains important to the future of democracy in Europe. In this respect, the co-operation between the OSCE Mission and the Government of Serbia is highly appreciated.

Last year, we spoke on the importance of the mission's support to the drafting of a new Media Strategy. This strategy was adopted on 30 January this year. The development of

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the strategy was transparent and inclusive, bringing together all stakeholders: government, civil society, academia, as well as the media itself and its associations. Adoption of this strategy marks tangible progress towards greater media freedom.

Freedom of the media is an essential element of democracy and remains a priority for Norway. To that end, we have supported the mission's efforts to assist in preparing the Media Strategy. Together with Norway, the mission also held a media seminar in March 2020, marking the adoption of the Strategy. The seminar brought together stakeholders from across government, the media, and the international community. The next steps of putting the strategy into action are important: This begins with converting the strategy into action plans, and subsequently amending the media laws.

We appreciate the continued efforts in the area of gender mainstreaming, including during the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak. We appreciate the development of a gender analysis of the impact of measures implemented in recent months. We furthermore welcome the increased reporting on gender equality in this year's reports. Efforts for gender mainstreaming are clearly shown in the support to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325, as well as in the work on parliamentary support, good governance and regional connectivity. We strongly welcome that gender mainstreaming to this extent has taken hold in the Mission to Serbia.

Norway welcomes the adoption of new laws in the area of anticorruption. Countering corruption is important in its own right, but also for countering transnational threats and organised crime. Norway will continue to support the implementation of laws, as we have done by supporting the mission in enhancing the investigative capacity of the specialized Anti-Corruption Department of the Ministry of Interior. As is recognised in the report, civil society and the media play important oversight parts in combatting corruption and raising awareness of new regulations, which should remain a key priority of the mission.

Norway appreciates the expertise and monitoring provided by the Mission of the progress of the Regional Housing Programme (RHP), a programme Norway has supported since the beginning.

Norway values the efforts of the OSCE Mission to Serbia to contribute to regional stability. The OSCE is an arrangement that increases contact and cooperation in our region, so that our common security might best be preserved. We appreciate the efforts made to this end by Mission of Serbia, its staff, and its head, Ambassador Orizio, who is getting closer to reaching the completion of his assignment. We thank him for the good cooperation we have enjoyed through both our embassy in Belgrade and our mission in Vienna. We wish him all the best for the last leg of his term as Head of the Mission to Serbia.