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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1291st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

26 November 2020

On the 25th anniversary of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Chairperson,

This year marks both the 25th commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide and the 25th anniversary of the Dayton/Paris Peace Accords; we expect the political elites to take strong and tangible political action, demonstrating their deep commitment to promoting reconciliation in the country. Revisionism, in particular the minimization or denial of the Srebrenica genocide, and the glorification of war criminals convicted by the courts run contrary to the values of the European Union and are incompatible with the prospect of integration into the European Union.

Mr Chairperson, in December 2019, the Council of the European Union reiterated its unequivocal commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective as a single, united and sovereign country. The EU urged executive and legislative bodies at all levels of government to start addressing the 14 key priorities identified in the Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union, in line with the interests of all citizens to advance towards the European Union.

In the past months, Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities have taken some steps to address the Opinion's key priorities. The EU welcomes that for the first time since 2008, local elections will take place in the city of Mostar on 20 December 2020. As mentioned in the Commission 2020 Communication on EU enlargement policy, political leaders also reached an agreement on 17 June 2020 on further electoral reform. We call for an inclusive process of electoral reform, through genuine dialogue and in line with European standards, that would eliminate all forms of inequality and discrimination in the electoral process. Regarding the local elections which were held on 15 November in the whole country and which are to be held on 20 December in Mostar, we wish to recall the importance of refraining from any provocative statements aimed at creating a climate of division. We underline that no legislative or political step should be taken which would make the implementation of the Sejdic Finci ruling and related ECHR rulings more challenging.

We welcome the recent adoption of the revised national war crime strategy, and call for its swift implementation, which will contribute to the wider goal of promoting an environment conducive to reconciliation.

We call on the authorities of the country to build on this momentum and continue to engage on reforms, thereby giving tangible proof that Bosnia and Herzegovina is willing to take the necessary steps to become a member of the EU.

The European Union underlines the need for the authorities to work towards strengthening the rule of law, in particular the independence and integrity of the judiciary, fighting corruption and organised crime, countering radicalisation as well as guaranteeing the independence of the media, safety of journalists and media actors, promoting youth employment and education, gender equality and renewing their efforts towards socioeconomic reforms. Bosnia and Herzegovina can count on the commitment of the European Union to support its reforms and its economic and social development. But the onus is on the political leaders of the country who still need to demonstrate political will to undertake major reforms.

We also expect the authorities to fully assume their responsibilities with regard to the migration situation, and in particular and as a matter of urgency to create the conditions, with our support, for responding to the humanitarian needs, including shelter for refugees and migrants, while working to strengthen their border management capacities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, like the rest of Europe, continues to be impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In these difficult times, the EU remains firmly engaged in assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina in addressing the immediate health needs as well as with the long-term social and economic impact resulting from the pandemic. The recent Commission's Economic and Investment Plan, once again demonstrates the EU's strong commitment towards Bosnia and Herzegovina and all the Western Balkans' partners.

Lastly, with regard to the political and security situation on the ground and the importance of maintaining a safe and secure environment, the European Union reiterates its firm support to EUFOR Althea and to the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹ and Albania¹, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

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