



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council Nr 942 Vienna, 28 February 2013**

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#### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, H.E. Ambassador Peter Burkhard**

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The European Union warmly welcomes H. E. Ambassador Burkhard to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his detailed report. We appreciate the valuable work carried out by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our unequivocal commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans. In that regard, while recognising that Serbia continues on its way to sufficiently fulfilling the political criteria and conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process, we urge Serbia to continue to address the issues set out in the Conclusions of the General Affairs Council of December 2012, notably the need to make further progress on the reform agenda and the key priority of taking steps towards a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo.

We commend the increasing and very high level of engagement between Belgrade and Pristina and welcome the progress made in the EU-facilitated dialogue and encourage further efforts to this end. It remains crucially important to fully implement agreements already reached, and also to accelerate progress in resolving outstanding issues.

We welcome the Mission's assessment that Serbia has continued on its path of reform, and encourage Serbia to reinvigorate, further develop, and implement the reform agenda, particularly in the areas of the rule of law, including judicial reform and tackling corruption and organised crime, the independence of key institutions, and further improving the business environment. Special attention should be given to the rights and inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma, as well as to the effective implementation of legislation on the protection of persons belonging to minorities, the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, and tackling discrimination on the basis of

sexual orientation or gender identity. Serbia should also continue to constructively engage in regional cooperation and strengthen relations with neighbouring countries.

We also look forward to the prompt and effective implementation of the National Media Strategy, in particular the elements concerning state withdrawal from the media sector and transparency of media ownership.

We are concerned about the increase in challenges to freedom of expression, particularly the upturn in hate speech and intolerance towards certain segments of society and against journalists. We recall our concern over the cancellation of the Pride Parade and underline that it is responsibility of each government to ensure the right to freedom of assembly for all its citizens, without exception, including the right to protest peacefully.

The OSCE Mission continues to provide useful support to Serbia in addressing many of these key areas, and also in the field of inter-ethnic relations where the Mission continues to play a crucial and unique role. In that regard, we welcome the renewed dialogue concerning monuments in southern Serbia, and call on both sides to continue dialogue on all issues affecting the lives of Serbian citizens of all communities in southern Serbia.

We encourage the OSCE Mission to continue to foster strong co-operation with other key actors, particularly the EU. The Mission should also look for opportunities to co-operate with other OSCE Missions on region-wide issues, and build on its work with the Mission in Kosovo in support of wider reconciliation efforts. We also encourage the Mission to continue to offer its support to Serbia with respect to its preparations for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2015.

In conclusion we would like to thank Ambassador Burkhard and his team for their hard work and we reiterate our full support for the Mission's work.

The Acceding Country Croatia\*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, and Iceland+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and

Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

\* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.