



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1041 Vienna, 26 February 2015

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report of the OSCE Head of Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Burkhard**

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The EU and its Member States would like to welcome Ambassador Burkhard to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report, which provides detailed insight into the activities of the Mission across its mandate, with clarity where the opportunities and challenges lie.

Since Ambassador Burkhard's last report there have been positive developments for Serbia and in the region, including the agreement in Brussels two weeks ago on the judiciary in the framework of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, and the start of Serbia's Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE. Serbia's continued commitment to the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue - notwithstanding a slowing of progress in the 2014 due to elections on both sides - has helped ensure its recent reinvigoration, and we look forward to progress in completing the implementation of the normalisation agreement of April 2013, as well as in reaching and implementing further agreements in the near future. We encourage Serbia to continue to coordinate with ODHIR to address the recommendations in ODHIR's final report on the March 2014 parliamentary elections, as well as outstanding issues from the ODHIR report on the 2012 elections.

Mr Chairperson, we welcome that the Government of Aleksandar Vučić has renewed Serbia's commitment to economic and political reforms, and 2014 saw considerable activity in that regard. We look forward to the opening of Chapters for Serbia's EU accession as soon as the necessary conditions are in place, particularly Chapters 23 and 24, which will tackle the core issues of rule of law and fundamental rights and Chapter 35 which is linked to the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. But we note Ambassador Burkhard's concern that the Government has not consulted widely or inclusively enough on the new laws and reforms, and we encourage Serbia to adapt its approach accordingly as it tackles future reforms. These remain particularly

important in the areas of anti-corruption, the fight against organised crime, the economy, public administration and ensuring an effective, independent judiciary.

Serbia will also need to refocus its efforts in ensuring that the implementation of new media legislation contributes to the full enjoyment of freedom of expression and allows independent media to thrive. In that regard we note that the European Commission progress report on Serbia found conditions for the exercise of freedom of expression to be deteriorating. It is therefore important for the Mission to work on media freedom and freedom of expression issues as a priority, while fully respecting the mandate and autonomy of the Representative for the Freedom of Media. We welcome the steps that have been taken by the government of Serbia to improve dialogue and cooperation with the Representative.

Mr Chairperson, the OSCE Mission to Serbia continues to add considerable value in assisting Serbia to consolidate reforms, which help it move along the path towards EU integration. We welcome the niche projects that the Mission is implementing in a number of sectors, and the positive impact stemming from these. We also welcome the Mission's focus on regional cooperation – a priority of the Serbian Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, for example the regional approach to organised crime with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro. We would be interested in hearing Ambassador Burkhard's view on how Missions in the region can facilitate further cooperation, and in what specific areas – for example foreign terrorist fighters and illegal immigration.

We welcome the Mission's continuing engagement with national minorities, especially through its presence on the ground in south and south-west Serbia. We fully support the Mission's intention to focus on implementation and reform of legislation relating to national minorities during this mandate, and underline the importance of upholding international standards for the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities and protection of vulnerable groups throughout Serbia and protection of their rights. We regret that negotiations in south Serbia between ethnic Albanian leaders and the central government on the seven point Common Agenda have stalled and underline the continuing importance we attach to making progress on the Agenda. We welcome that the Pride Parade took

place without major incident on 28 September, which was an important milestone in ensuring the protection of all minorities in Serbia.

Mr Chairperson, we underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to ensuring the efficient use of resources, and that their activities remain results oriented and add value. We note the efforts of the Mission to Serbia to focus on results and follow-up, and we encourage the Mission to increase these efforts, to ensure that all activities and reporting are representative of a culture of evaluation and lessons implementation in the Mission. To that end, we would be grateful if Ambassador Burkhard could highlight some of the key impacts of the Mission's programmatic work during the reporting period.

Finally, we once again commend the work of Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić in his first two months as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. We would like to take this opportunity to encourage Serbia to use the rest of its Chairmanship to continue to promote peace, security, reconciliation and implementation of OSCE commitments across the OSCE region, and we trust that the Serbian Chairmanship will lead by example. Serbia can expect the continued support of the EU and its Member States in that regard.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania 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.