



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 992 Vienna, March 27 2014

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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 EU and its Member States would like to welcome Ambassador Burkhard to the Permanent Council and thank him for his detailed report.

Since Ambassador Burkhard's last report to the Permanent Council, we have seen important and welcome developments for Serbia and the whole region, notably the opening of accession negotiations with Serbia, and the significant steps made towards normalisation of relations with Kosovo\*.

We also congratulate Serbia on holding parliamentary elections that, based on the preliminary findings of the OSCE and PACE election observation missions, offered voters a genuine choice and respected fundamental freedoms. We encourage Serbia to work with ODIHR to address any recommendations in its final report, including the outstanding recommendations made after the 2012 elections. We appreciate the OSCE's role in successfully collecting votes in Kosovo.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Mr Chairman,

We now look forward to the prompt formation of a new government in Serbia that delivers on its commitment to reforms, the democratic values of the EU, and European integration, including through continuing to normalise relations with Kosovo. Reforms in the area of rule of law, notably judicial reform and strengthening the institutions which fight against organised crime and corruption, deep economic reforms and reforming public administration remain crucial. We will continue to support Serbia's efforts in this regard.

It will also be important for Serbia to accelerate implementation of the media strategy and efforts to protect the freedom of expression. In that regard, we note that the preliminary findings of the OSCE and PACE election observation missions raised some concerns about transparency of media ownership. Promoting media freedom is also crucial for Serbia and we therefore encourage the new government to bring new momentum to the reform of media legislation, and make full use of the OSCE's expertise in this field.

Respecting and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including through effective implementation of the existing legislation, ensuring non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, and rights and inclusions of vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma, deserve special attention. We welcome the Mission's continuing work with persons belonging to national minorities, including in southern and south-western Serbia. It is important that both the Serbian authorities and the local communities continue to engage actively and constructively with each other to resolve any issues of concern. In the coming months, Serbia has the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to freedom of expression and assembly for all groups by creating the conditions for a Pride parade to go ahead.

Mr Chairman,

The Mission plays an important role in assisting Serbia to consolidate key reforms. We welcome its co-operation with the international community and, in particular, commend its co-operation with the European Union. We also welcome the Mission's support for the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme of the Sarajevo process. The Mission can effectively respond to changes on the ground and focus on areas where our Organisation has a recognised added-value. We underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to ensure efficient use of resources and aids the development of best practices and the process of lesson learning. We would be grateful if Ambassador Burkhard could highlight some of the key impacts made by the Mission through its programmatic work in this reporting period.

Finally, Mr Chairman,

We look forward to Serbia assuming the first responsibilities of its OSCE Chairmanship in a few months' time. We would like to take this opportunity to encourage Serbia to use its Chairmanship to promote peace, security, reconciliation, and implementation of OSCE Commitments across the OSCE region. The European Union and its Member States will support Serbia in discharging that great responsibility.

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

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro 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.