



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1179 Vienna, 15 March 2018

EU Statement in response to Ambassador Orizio

The European Union and its member States welcome Ambassador Orizio to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report on the OSCE mission to Serbia's activities over the past year.

We welcome Serbia's continued reform efforts and progress on its path to joining the European Union so far and encourage further efforts on effective implementation and monitoring of reforms in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, independence of democratic institutions, public administration, as well as in developing a functioning market economy and improving the business environment. The European Union reiterates its commitment to Serbia's European perspective and stands ready to support Serbia in tackling the remaining challenges.

We note the Government's continued will to implement reforms and welcome the Ambassador Orizio's emphasis on the need to focus on the quality and implementation of new and existing legislation. In that regard, we note the delays facing the strengthening of the rule of law, in particular the implementation of judicial reform and the need to ensure judicial independence in the amendment of existing legislation.

The European Union and its Member States continue to highly value the important support provided to Serbia by the OSCE Mission in its core mandated areas of police reform, rule of law, democratisation and the media, as well combating organised crime. We continue to commend the work of the Mission's presences in Novi Pazar and Bujanovac. We note that Ambassador Orizio highlighted that no progress was made on implementation of the "Seven Point Plan" in South Serbia during the reporting period, but welcome the Mission's continued practical engagement in the region, including through language courses and seminars on Bar exam preparation.

We would appreciate Ambassador Orizio's reflections on the main obstacles to implementation of the Seven Point Plan, and on how the Mission will support this process in 2018.

We welcome the long-overdue appointment of the War Crimes Prosecutor on 15th May 2017 and note the problems caused by the vacancy of that position from December 2015, as reported by the Mission. We stress the need to fight impunity for war crimes as well as the need to ensure victims' rights and access to justice without discrimination. We reiterate the need to maintain due attention to the fate of missing persons who disappeared in the conflicts in the 1990s, and stress the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in contributing to stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and the legacies of the past.

We underline the importance of respecting and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, as well as ensuring non-discriminatory treatment, in line with international standards and commitments and bilateral agreements pertaining to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. This is of particular importance in relation to education, the use of languages, access to media and religious services in minority languages, and representation in public administration and representative bodies at all levels. In that regard we welcome the Mission's support to the implementation of the Action Plan for the Realization of Rights of National Minorities, including facilitation of the revision of the Law on National Councils of national Minorities. Both processes need to be followed closely. We also appreciate assistance provided to implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma.

We strongly encourage the host country to ensure consistent implementation of fundamental rights across Serbia, especially to improve conditions for the full exercise of freedom of expression. We continue to highly value the Mission's focus on Human Dimension issues in particular, including on tolerance and non-discrimination and combating hate crimes. We appreciate the broad range of activities undertaken during the reporting period and would be interested in hearing Ambassador Orizio's views on the impact of the Mission's work on combating hate crimes.

We note the considerable challenges in making progress on media freedom in Serbia described in the report. We look forward to the finalisation of the new Media Strategy in 2018 and would appreciate more information on the working group tasked with development of the new Media Strategy and recent developments. We also note with concern the increase in number of professional standards breaches in 2017 and continuing threats to safety of journalists, as raised by the European Federation of Journalists last year, and in that regard welcome the enhanced focus by the Mission on this area of its mandate.

We appreciate the focus on youth throughout the Mission's activities and engagement with RYCO. We would appreciate more information on how gender has been mainstreamed across the Mission's activities.

We continue to encourage the Mission to embed further a culture of evaluation into its operations and welcome efforts to demonstrate tangible outcomes.

We recall that progress in the EU facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is an essential requirement for both in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region, and we urge both sides to constructively engage in this process.

We wish Ambassador Orizio and his able team every success in the coming year.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, 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.