



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1165 Vienna, 23 November 2017

EU Statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Borchardt

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, and thanks him for presenting the Report of the OSCE Presence in Albania to the Permanent Council.

The OSCE has a strong presence in the Western Balkans, cooperating with and assisting the region in the implementation of OSCE commitments. OSCE activities help stabilize the region, reduce tensions in politically sensitive situations, strengthen the rule of law, and consolidate democracy. In this regard, we appreciate the cooperation between the OSCE Field Operations in South-Eastern Europe.

The EU remains firmly committed to Albania's EU integration process, and is determined to accompany and support this process. It is very important to the European Union that Albania is firmly committed to its EU reform agenda. The actual opening of negotiation depends on Albania's further progress on the five key priorities. It is vital that Albania continues the good work and reforms it has undertaken to show tangible, concrete results.

The adoption of the constitutional amendments in 2016 was a crucial milestone paving the way for the implementation of a meaningful justice reform. This unprecedented step addressed a longstanding request by the overwhelming majority of the citizens for justice that is accountable, independent and transparent. The EU supports the process with International Monitoring Operation led by the European Commission to monitor and oversee the vetting process. We are now looking forward to the first concrete results of this vetting process in the coming weeks and months.

We are convinced that this reform will be transformative for other areas too. It will contribute to creating a more predictable and transparent environment for business and investors. We are looking forward to stronger focus on areas including justice reform, police assistance, and in tackling organized crime, coordinated with other actors in the field.

Important steps forward on others issues have been made in particular related to rule of law, religious intolerance and the fight against violent extremism. The EU underlines that Albania should intensify its efforts to ensure the reform of the public administration and the judiciary, the fight against organised crime and corruption, the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies including in the area of rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and their equal treatment, and implementation of property rights.

2017 is marking the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Presence in Albania. Following the events in Albania in 1997, the support of the OSCE was essential in preparing elections, building trust in the newly created institutions, and bolstering the rule of law. Over the years, the programmatic work of the Presence in Albania was adjusted to reflect developments in Albania. This flexible approach applied in full coordination with the government makes the Presence as relevant as at its foundation. It remains a strong supporter of Albania's reform path and in mastering present challenges and OSCE commitments. We commend the ongoing work of the Presence in Albania in support of the host country's development, in particular in the fields of fighting organized crime and corruption, addressing environmental crime, protection of human rights as well as judicial and electoral reform.

Today, the OSCE Presence continues to make very important contributions to developments in Albania. We commend the contribution of the OSCE Presence in the process of substantial reform of the justice sector and welcome its plans to engage with the justice institutions in order to provide technical advice and assistance. We very much welcome Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence across the three dimensions and look forward to continued good cooperation with the OSCE Presence also in the future. The initiative of the Austrian Chairmanship to provide informal opportunities to discuss the impact of

field missions ahead of the PC helps to provide a clearer picture of the work of the Mission.

We appreciate in particular the Presence's continuous focus on co-operation with international organizations on election standards and management and its intention to continue working to support Central Election Commission in implementing ODIHR's recommendations contained in the Final Report of this year's Parliamentary election and from previous reports. This should contribute to the professionalization, independence and impartiality of the election administration to better prepare future elections. The European Union is ready to offer support in this regard, including through an ODIHR-implemented regional project, which can contribute to support the implementation of these recommendations.

We underline the importance we place on tackling corruption and welcome positive developments in that regard. We would be interested in hearing more on the Presence's plans in this area, noting the challenges outlined in Ambassador Borchardt's report. We would also appreciate information about how the Presence will engage on organised crime. We welcome the positive results achieved in the fight against cannabis cultivation and would be interested in hearing what the Presence is planning in supporting the fight against drug trafficking and cannabis cultivation.

We would also appreciate more information on Presence activity in the area of human trafficking during the reporting period, as well as how the Presence is mainstreaming gender and youth across its activities, and in particular plans to engage with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, based in Tirana. We welcome the fact that the Presence in Albania is supporting RYCO in its initial steps. It is essential that the OSCE and RYCO join forces to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among youth in the region and to prevent radicalisation in the region.

We appreciate the continued focus of the Presence on evaluation, including the use of external evaluation. Going forward we would welcome greater focus in reporting on evaluation outcomes, measured through the use of key performance indicators that have now been shared with participating States.

In concluding, we would like to thank Ambassador Borchardt and his staff for their high-quality work and their excellent political and operational cooperation and wish them every success in their activities.

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

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.