



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1304 Vienna, 4 March 2021**

#### **EU Statement in response to the Report by the Acting Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Kilian Wahl**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Mr. Kilian Wahl, Acting Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo to the Permanent Council.

We reiterate our resolute support for the valuable work carried out by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. The Mission has proven itself a trusted partner of all communities and contributes to a safe and secure, as well as democratic, prosperous and multi-ethnic Kosovo\*<sup>1</sup>, based on respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

The European Union welcomes the Mission's engagement on a wide range of valuable activities and its "whole-of-Mission" approach based on three key programmatic pillars: human rights and communities, democratization, and security and public safety. We welcome the fact that despite the serious constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission has shown a large degree of flexibility and continued to successfully adjust its core programmatic activities.

We particularly appreciate the Mission's efforts to promote inter-community relations. In this regard, we welcome the support for Kosovo institutions in

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

responding to and addressing security incidents and concrete concerns affecting persons belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups. Strengthening coordination with relevant stakeholders for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including their safety, and the protection of their property rights, along with the protection of their cultural and religious heritage, including the Special Protective Zones, should remain high on the Mission's agenda. In this respect, we welcome the positive developments achieved in Dečani thanks to Italy's facilitation.

We welcome the Mission's continued assistance to strengthening the inclusiveness and efficiency of the decision-making process. Improving the accountability and transparency of institutions remains especially important. The EU welcomes the fact that the Mission has been placing emphasis on other important areas as well, such as improving the rule of law, fighting organized crime and corruption, combating trafficking of human beings, and preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism.

We praise the Mission's priority to improve Kosovo's media environment and we welcome the continued focus on freedom of expression, increasing media literacy and the safety of journalists. In addition, we highlight the importance of engagement with civil society, including through youth-oriented activities, aimed at enhancing inter-ethnic relations and promoting dialogue. In this context, we encourage increased cooperation with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

The EU continues to appreciate the work done by the Mission on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the focus on combating gender-based violence as well as promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, dialogue and mediation.

We welcome the cooperation between the EU and the Mission on strengthening the electoral process in Kosovo. On 14 February 2021, people in Kosovo exercised their democratic rights in the early parliamentary elections. The EU deployed an Electoral Expert Mission (EEM) to observe the elections. The recommendations of the successive EU Election Observation Missions should be followed up with determination. We also took note that, for the first time since 2013, the elections in

the four northern municipalities in Kosovo were successfully carried out without the assistance of the OSCE Mission.

The European Union is looking forward to the formation of the new Assembly and government as well as the election of a new President. We will continue to engage with the relevant stakeholders, with a view to supporting Kosovo in achieving tangible progress on its European path, including through financial and technical assistance. This will require Kosovo to advance on reforms, guided by the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the European Reform Agenda, as well as on regional cooperation.

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has provided strong support to the Western Balkans region from early on. In Kosovo, the EU has provided immediate emergency assistance for medical equipment, adopted an assistance package of EUR 68 million, and supplied EUR 100 million in macro-financial assistance in order to help Kosovo mitigate the economic and social consequences of the crisis. The EU is also working on supporting access to COVID-19 vaccines in the region. The EU has put EUR 70 million in place for the region to purchase vaccines from Member States. Moreover, the EU has recently doubled the EU contribution to COVAX to EUR 2.2bn. The EU is also supporting the region to prepare for the rollout, including through funding to WHO and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

We underline that progress in the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina remains an essential requirement for both in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region. Both sides now must build on the recent positive momentum and make additional substantial efforts, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive legally-binding agreement. Such an agreement is urgent and crucial for the stability in the region.

In conclusion, with a strong interest in the political and security consolidation in the region, the European Union remains determined to continue to assist Kosovo towards lasting stability. We would like to thank once again Mr Kilian Wahl and assure him and the Mission's capable team of the European Union's continued support.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH 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 GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.