



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1235 Vienna, 11 July 2019**

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, H.E. Ambassador Clemens Koja**

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Clemens Koja, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his timely and comprehensive report.

The EU welcomes the priorities of the Mission, as outlined in the report, focusing in particular on four areas in order to support the government reform priorities: the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the advancement of constructive inter-ethnic relations; the Government's reform agenda in mandated areas such as police and law enforcement, rule of law and the justice sector, media freedom and democratic governance reforms; addressing transnational threats, including organized crime, cybercrime, trafficking in human beings and violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism and last but not least to provide early warning on security-related developments throughout the country.

We appreciate the very good cooperation that the Mission has with the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and that through its valuable activities the Mission has assisted in a significant way the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in its efforts to implement its reform agenda.

We fully agree with the outlook of the Mission on its future work, such as to continue to strongly support the reform priorities of the authorities that fall within its mandate, while maintaining a focus on other key reform areas, including those related to the Ohrid Framework Agreement and social cohesion that contribute to the long term stability of the country.

We reiterate the importance we attach to accountability tools, such as the Gender Markers, to measure and report on progress made. In this respect we welcome that the Mission introduced the Gender Marker score regarding all Unified Budget-funded projects in 2019. We also welcome that the Mission's Gender Working Group has prepared an Annual Activity Plan for 2019, so that gender mainstreaming could be incorporated also in strategic planning and project implementation.

We also welcome the close cooperation with the Regional Youth Co-operation Office (RYCO) by supporting the participation of scholars and short-listed candidates from the host country at the final "Connectivity Meeting" in Tirana of Young Developers and Entrepreneurs to Advance Start-ups in the Western Balkans.

We encourage the mission to pursue its work on the safety of journalists and on the freedom of the media. The climate for media freedom and freedom of expression continued to improve. But further work is required.

The European Union thanks the Mission for its very comprehensive report offering important insights into the work of the Mission and the operational environment, generating further interest on several topics. We would like to know more about the project "Building Bridges", one of the core projects of the mission. It has reached 146 schools, involving about 5300 students from different communities. What is the percentage of students reached by the project in relation to the total number of students in the Republic of North Macedonia? Does it have a regional focus or does it reach schools all over the country?

Recently, the OSCE-led survey on "The Well-being and Safety of Women" was published. What role do you see for the Mission in follow-up to the findings and recommendations of the survey?

The EU has consistently reaffirmed its commitment to enlargement, which remains a key policy of the European Union. It continues to represent a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. We reiterate, that embracing and committing to core European values is a choice, and we continue to expect partners to take ownership and fully commit to European values and the vigorous pursuit of necessary reforms in the interest of their people.

The Prespa Agreement and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria represent significant achievements, setting a positive example for the region and beyond. We recall the importance of their continued implementation. Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the Enlargement Process, as well as of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The EU underlines the continued need to focus on fundamental reforms to address persisting structural shortcomings in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness. A solid track record of reform implementation and concrete and tangible results in these crucial areas remain essential, in particular for the overall pace of the accession negotiations.

In the Republic of North Macedonia substantial progress has been achieved over the reporting period. We fully endorse the findings of the Missions report, that the successful implementation of the Prespa Agreement has improved the overall outlook for reforms. In this regard we would like to highlight the progress achieved in the strengthening of the independence of the judiciary, in the fight against corruption and the professionalization of the public administration. We commend the atmosphere of openness reported by civil society and media representatives. However, much work remains to be done. We encourage the government of the Republic of North Macedonia to continue to pursue its reform agenda consistently and to achieve further progress and to engage in further cooperation with the Mission in the implementation of its mandate.

We appreciate the very good cooperation between the OSCE Mission to Skopje and the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of North Macedonia. Finally, we would like to assure you, Ambassador, of our full support and wish you and your team success in your important work.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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