



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1276 Vienna, 23 July 2020**

#### **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 back to the Permanent Council and express gratitude for the Mission's comprehensive and timely report.

As you outline in your report, Ambassador Koja, the early parliamentary elections in the Republic of North Macedonia on 15 July took place in the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend the citizens for exercising their right to vote. According to ODIHR preliminary findings and conclusions, the elections were generally well organised amid adjustments implemented in response to the pandemic. The campaign was genuinely competitive, but legal stability was undermined by substantial revisions to the legal framework and subsequent government decrees. Once the OSCE/ODIHR issues its final report, the European Union expects all political actors, relevant institutions and stakeholders to continue to work together to implement the recommendations well ahead of the next elections.

We look forward to working with a strong parliament and a stable coalition government that should deliver on the country's strategic objective of EU integration and address citizens' expectations. We are committed to continue supporting the country in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We call on the authorities to continue to deliver on the country's EU commitments, to sustain and accelerate the implementation of EU-related reforms, in particular in the

field of rule of law, the fight against organized crime and corruption, as well as to further strengthen good neighbourly relations, including with the EU Member States. We also recall the importance of achieving tangible results and implementing bilateral agreements fully, consistently and in good faith, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria, as part of the enlargement process. The European Union reiterates its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and will continue to support the Republic of North Macedonia on its path to the EU and looks forward to the holding of the first Intergovernmental Conference after the adoption of the negotiating framework by the Council of the European Union as soon as possible.

We commend the Mission for assisting the government and citizens of the host country in responding quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU is re-directing up to € 66 Million to support the country's immediate needs and to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis. The macro-financial assistance will be an important complement to this support package with a loan of €160 Million. The EU is aware that the crisis consequences will continue to affect the working conditions of the Mission and may also make an adjustment of its program necessary as it further unfolds.

We welcome the priority on supporting the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and advancing constructive inter-ethnic relations, providing early warning on emerging security-related developments throughout the country. We also welcome the Mission's support to the reform agenda in key sectors such as the rule of law, media freedom, democratic governance and transnational threats, including organised crime.

With regard to the Human Dimension, we support the Mission's Programme to proactively support the host country in advancing constructive inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion, and bridging divisive trends in society in particular by paying special attention to promoting integrative policies. We commend you for supporting the Ministry of Education in its efforts in fostering inter-culturalism, anti-discrimination, gender equality, multi-ethnic inclusion in its education strategy and programs. We appreciate the focus on the most vulnerable communities, including Roma.

We welcome the Mission's work with youth organisations and we appreciate that youth will be a priority audience for the Mission's work.

We fully support the Mission's work on promoting the rule of law, including its assistance in the implementation of the National Judicial Reform Strategy aimed at ensuring a fair, impartial, effective, accountable and transparent administration of justice, while also contributing to support efforts to renew public trust in the justice system. We welcome that the Mission will continue to provide assistance in public administration reform and local democratic governance supporting efforts to address shortcomings in accountability, transparency and efficiency as well as by instilling public confidence in the fight against corruption. We appreciate your activities to strengthen parliamentary oversight over the executive branch.

We welcome the Mission's continued support for the implementation of the laws on prevention of discrimination and hate crime in particular of several new laws in this field.

We fully support the inclusion of gender considerations into the Mission's policy dialogue with the host authorities, of mainstreaming gender equality into all of its programmatic work and developing targeted actions for women's empowerment. We welcome the aim to enhance its work on combating gender based-violence, accentuated by the COVID-19 epidemic.

We share your belief that it is important for the Mission to continue its work on media policy, with particular focus on the important issues of freedom of media, safety of journalists and media literacy.

Regarding the Politico-Military Dimension, we highly appreciate the intention to support the host country's police reform with the aim of creating a professional police service. Fighting corruption in all its forms as well as trans-national threats and organized crime continue to be of high relevance. We appreciate your work on trafficking in human beings, illicit trafficking in weapons, ammunition and explosives

in line with the national Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) strategy by strengthening regional cooperation and operational capacities for integrated border management.

The Mission's work on migration and on environmental issues such as climate and security as well as on anti-corruption and good governance including the environmental aspects of corruption are also highly valued. We particularly appreciate your support to the establishment and work of the new Aarhus center in Skopje. Challenges like environmental degradation, competition over natural resources, the fight against corruption and its facilitation of trafficking in natural resources and climate change have to be addressed in a systematic way. Therefore, we believe that the Mission could use OSCE's expertise and networks to cooperate with relevant stakeholders with the aim of broadening environmental awareness.

We appreciate the very good cooperation between the OSCE Mission to Skopje and the Delegation of the European Union in the country. We are also grateful for your regular briefings for the diplomatic corps in Skopje. 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\*, 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, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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