



STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE HEAD OF THE OSCE MISSION TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

As delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 21 March 2024

Thank you, Madame Chair,

I welcome Ambassador Aggeler to the Permanent Council and thank him for his presentation as well as for the Mission's written report. We commend the Mission for its efficiency despite the obvious challenges imposed on it by the lacking budget agreement.

Norway supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as one State, comprised of two entities and the Brčko-District, as well as its multiethnic character. We welcome the European Commission recommendation to the Council of the European Union to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and hope that progress on the EU path will incite politicians to embark on a reform path to the benefit of citizens. We fully support the country's cooperation with NATO, also in light of Norway's role as NATO Contact Point Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Mission's support to improving the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with ODIHR recommendations is important. We regret that progress on election integrity legislation is still pending, as local elections in October are rapidly approaching.

We note that the country is still facing serious challenges; a continued political crisis, "brain-drain", and limited progress on reforms. Freedom of expression and freedom of press are core principles of a democracy all parties should strive to secure. We regret the recriminalization of defamation in Republika Srpska in July 2023, and the adoption in first reading of a draft law on foreign agents. We call on the Republika Srpska to refrain from adopting the draft law on foreign agents in the second reading. We furthermore remain concerned by last year's attacks against members of the LGBT+ community and urge authorities to ensure the security and human rights of this community.

The deteriorated security situation in Europe with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine makes stability and democratic progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the

Western Balkans even more important. Norway will continue to support reforms that increase stability and security in the region. The continued work of Operation EUFOR Althea is key to maintaining a safe and secure environment for all citizens of the country.

Madame Chair,

We have been pleased to contribute to the Mission's projects, for instance the ones on intelligence-led policing and on hate crimes underreporting. We are grateful for excellent cooperation with the Mission in this regard and look forward to continued dialogue about your programmatic work.

We appreciate the Mission's focus on gender equality and on gender mainstreaming across dimensions and activities of the field operations.

Colleagues,

As donors to the OSCE field operations, it is our responsibility and duty to ensure that they can carry out their work effectively. Providing a sufficient budget is one cornerstone. But field operations are also subjected to the diverging, and often inconsistent, priorities of participating States. This leads to fragmentation of the project portfolio. The fragmentation creates a focus on a list of activities rather than on main objectives and overarching results.

As participating States, we must take this challenge seriously, and provide the space required for the field operations to work more efficiently, with long-term impact on the ground as their focus.

Ambassador Aggeler, I wish you and your colleagues in Bosnia and Hercegovina the best of luck in your work. Rest assured about Norway's support.

Thank you.