



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1156 Vienna, 31 August 2017

EU statement in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jan Braathu

The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Jan Braathu to the Permanent Council and thank him for the report on the activities of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo*.

We reiterate our firm support for the valuable work carried out by the Mission in contributing to a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo, based on respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law including rights of persons belonging to minorities.

We appreciate the Mission's assistance to Kosovo election management bodies and its support to the conduct of the election process, including the work done previously in the context of Serbian elections in Kosovo. We also appreciate the support provided by sister missions in the region who have dedicated resources and staff to help OMiK in the organisation of these complex operations.

The 11 June elections took place at a critical time for Kosovo and the reforms agenda. Whilst the EU welcomes the orderly conduct of the June 2017 elections in Kosovo, we are concerned about the persistence of longstanding weaknesses in the electoral process, as well as disturbing pattern of intimidation within Serb majority areas.

* References to Kosovo are without prejudice to positions on status. They are in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and the opinion by the International Court of Justice on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The EU expects all political leaders to ensure a swift formation of the new government according to the laws and constitution of Kosovo, so that important work related to economic development, the promotion of the rule of law, the EU-facilitated Dialogue with Belgrade and visa liberalisation is advanced without further delay. The EU recalls that ratification of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro is one of the two remaining requirements for visa liberalisation to be approved by the European Parliament and Council, along with meaningfully improving the track record in fighting organised crime and corruption.

We recall that progress in the EU facilitated Dialogue and thus progress in the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is an essential requirement for both, in order to advance on their respective European paths. We note that progress has slowed in this regard and urge both sides to constructively engage in this process. In this context, the EU welcomes that the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, and the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, are meeting this morning with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, to exchange views on the continuation of the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, following their agreement on 3 July to start preparing a new phase of the dialogue.

We welcome some development in the implementation of the agreement on the concept of integrated management of crossing points as well as the agreement of telecommunications. We reiterate our call to implement as soon as possible the agreement on the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities, and for concrete progress in the energy agreements and the implementation of obligations regarding the integration of Judges, Prosecutors and Judicial Staff, and hope for tangible steps in this direction at the meeting between Presidents Vučić and Thaci today.

The EU encourages Kosovo to further intensify its efforts to improve the rule of law, including judicial independence from political interference, and to reinforce its fight against organised crime and corruption. Most notably, the preferential treatment of high-level prisoners is particularly worrisome.

We continue to underline the need for effective and intense regional and international cooperation in the areas of trafficking in human beings, organised crime, drug trafficking, combatting radicalisation and terrorism, the return of displaced persons and the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities.

The EU notes positive steps taken in fighting radicalisation, extremism and terrorism and encourages further efforts. We also welcome the Mission's engagement in contributing to Kosovo's efforts in countering radicalisation.

Given the current challenges, we welcome the Mission's active contribution to the implementation of Kosovo's reform agenda and call for further efforts by the Mission to strengthen the regional approach and enhance coordination with other field operations in the region.

We welcome the activities involving youth as well as the support provided by the Mission to the Western Balkans Regional Youth Coordination Office (RYCO). We would be particularly interested in hearing more on regional coordination on youth, and how the South East European field operations can engage most productively with RYCO.

We support the Mission's work in the area of democratisation, in particular regarding strengthening public oversight, co-ordination and communication between central and local institutions, and its activities on strengthening media reporting, the freedom of the media and safety of journalists. In that regard we note with concern increasing violence against journalists, and would be interested in hearing how the Mission intends to respond to this development.

We encourage further efforts by the Mission to strengthen the coordination with authorities regarding the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities throughout Kosovo, including their safety, protection of their property rights, language rights and the protection of their cultural and religious heritage. In this respect, we commend Ambassador Braathu and his team for the pro-active follow-up to community concerns in different regions. We regret that the Implementation

and Monitoring Council's work has been stalled. Furthermore we remain concerned by a continued lack of implementation since 2016 of the Kosovo Constitutional Court ruling on the land dispute case in Decan/e and we call for its full implementation without delay.

The EU appreciates the work done by the Mission related to gender equality and empowering women of Kosovo, including the special training of members of the Association of Women in Kosovo Police in police management, training of policewomen trainers in investigation and community policing, as well as supporting the inclusion and inter-faith dialogue of women religious representatives.

We welcome the implementation of restructuring of the Mission, allowing it to focus fully on the Mission mandate and programmatic activities. We welcome the Mission's continued efforts to handover activities to local stakeholders. We also welcome the specific examples of results achieved provided in this report. We encourage Ambassador Braathu to continue this practice and make more use of the six monthly reports to the PC to report on the impact of the Mission's work.

In conclusion, we would like to thank once again Ambassador Braathu and assure him and his able team of the EU's continued support.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

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