



**EUROPEAN UNION**

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1154  
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**EU Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the  
OSCE Mission to Skopje, H.E. Ambassador Nina  
Suomalainen**

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The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Nina Suomalainen, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, back to the Permanent Council and express gratitude for her comprehensive report. We welcome that the Mission responded constructively and flexibly to events in the host country during the reporting period, and would firstly like to express our appreciation to Ambassador Suomalainen and all of her team in that regard.

The European Union has consistently reiterated its commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans, in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda and in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association process, and European Council and Council Conclusions, including regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations. It is in this framework that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been granted the status of candidate country.

In this context, we welcome that the new government has committed to the conditions set, and we expect steps to be taken to fulfill these, including the reforms required by the European Union in the framework of the enlargement process, in particular regarding full implementation of all parts of the Pržino Agreement and of the Urgent Reform Priorities. We recall the importance attached to accountability, and in that respect we support the work of the Special Prosecutor and the unhindered fulfillment of her task.

We take note that the main constraint to the implementation of the Mission's programmatic activities in the reporting period was the protracted political crisis,

which significantly limited the host country's ability to implement reforms. We also take note that inter-ethnic relations remained fragile due, in part, to a lack of sustainable state-led integration policies. In that regard we hope there will be opportunities for the Mission, also in cooperation with the autonomous institutions, to enhance its activities in several areas now that a new government has been appointed and would be interested in hearing more about potential areas of engagement, given that there have already been several expressions of interest from the new government, for increasing engagement with the Mission. In that regard we would welcome more information about the Mission's cooperation with international stakeholders on the ground to ensure cooperation and synergies in promoting reform in inter alia rule of law and the judiciary.

We highly appreciate the Mission's ongoing work on the three priorities of its mandate: supporting further implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA); advancing constructive inter-ethnic relations; and maintaining the Mission's effective monitoring and early warning capacity, highlighting through the invaluable role of its field station in Tetovo. We commend the important monitoring and confidence building activities of the Mission, which also serve as an early warning mechanism expressed also as part of the Security Principals guaranteeing the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

We welcome the Mission's pro-active support, together with the European Institute of Peace, to initiate a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. We strongly encourage the government to focus on follow up and implementation of the review's recommendations, in an inclusive and transparent manner.

We share the Mission's assessment that the country still faces serious challenges regarding media freedom. We would appreciate further information on how the Mission intends to support progress in this area.

The European Union fully supports the Mission's continuous efforts on promoting the rule of law, including its assistance in the implementation of Criminal Justice Reform and development of a professional police service. We take positive note of the Mission's plans to support the Parliament in fostering an inclusive

parliamentary process. We commend the continuing efforts of the Mission to promote a modern police service complying with international standards, including respect for human rights, to strengthen community policing, and counter organised crime and terrorism. We highly appreciate the efforts of the Mission to address Violent Extremism as part of the fight against terrorism.

We underline the importance of the Mission investing in enhanced cooperation with other OSCE field operations in the region, the institutions: the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. This work is of vital importance in improving political and inter-ethnic dialogue and supporting the follow-up to electoral recommendations. Further coordination with national and international counterparts and civil society organisations should also remain a priority.

We welcome the Mission's engagement with and support to civil society organisations, including those who reported that they were subject to politically-motivated inspections. We encourage the Mission to continue monitoring the situation and raising the issue with key interlocutors.

Effective evaluation is essential for all field operations in ensuring the efficient use of resources, and that activities remain result-oriented. We would be grateful if Ambassador Suomalainen could highlight some of the key impacts of the Mission's programmatic work in this period, and what is planned by way of evaluation during the next year.

We highly appreciated the role the Mission took on during the recent political developments, which was both impartial and fully in line with its mandate. We also appreciated the Austrian Chairmanship's efforts to address the political situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including through visits to Skopje by the Special Representative, Ambassador Strohal.

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 country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

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