



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1160 Vienna, 12 October 2017

EU statement in response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, H.E. Nikola Dimitrov

The EU welcomes Minister Dimitrov to the Permanent Council. We thank him for offering a comprehensive outline of the government's work since he assumed his responsibilities as Foreign Minister and for laying out its plans for the future. We thank the Chairmanship in Office for inviting Minister Dimitrov to the Permanent Council, for the first time since the formation of the new government.

We reiterate that the EU is committed to the EU accession process of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in line with the European perspective of the region, in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda and in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, as well as the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association process, European Council and Council Conclusions.

We encourage full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and strengthening of good neighbourly relations. As set out in European Council and Council Conclusions, maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, remains essential. We welcome the enhanced bilateral contacts and increased confidence-building measures between Skopje and Athens. We welcome the new momentum and hope to make progress on this issue.

We welcome that the government of PM Zaev has committed to the conditions set, and we expect steps to be taken to swiftly and fully fulfil these and the

reforms recommended by the European Union and to implement all parts of the Pržino Agreement and of the Urgent Reform Priorities. In particular, the 3-6-9 reform plan is a welcome step to deliver in priority areas in the short- to medium term. We also take note of the Priebe report published in September 2017 which identifies key areas where the implementation of laws requires further efforts such as media freedom, protection of civil society, independence of the judiciary and accountability of political actors. We recall the importance attached to accountability, and in that respect we support the work of the Special Prosecutor's office and the fulfilment of its task.

Mr Minister, over the last years we closely followed the developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with serious concern. We acknowledge the encouraging steps taken by the new government and we stress the need to continue moving beyond political divisions and build further inter-ethnic cohesion. The country needs unity and reconciliation. Inclusive engagement across party lines, taking into account the voice of civil society will be necessary in order to deliver on a common reform agenda that will benefit all citizens, in Parliament and outside. We call for more long-term confidence building measures, at political level, and more pro-active policies to further increase trust and build bridges among communities. The OSCE is well-equipped to support initiatives in this respect.

Regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations remain essential. We welcome the significant steps taken by the government in this regard, such as the signature of the Agreement on friendship, good neighbourly relations and cooperation with Bulgaria in August and the country's active participation and constructive approach in regional cooperation initiatives. We expect that the Government and political forces in the country will pursue this spirit of constructive cooperation with all neighbouring countries, which will contribute to strengthening stability in the region.

Ahead of the local elections, we encourage all representatives of political parties to act responsibly. We call on all institutions to ensure conditions for a credible and transparent electoral process allowing all citizens to exercise their democratic rights freely. Recalling the OSCE/ODIHR preliminary report, we

take note of its assessment and encourage you to follow up on previous and forthcoming electoral recommendations. We call for continued cooperation with the election observation mission, which we fully support.

Last July, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, Ambassador Nina Suomalainen presented the annual Report of the Mission's activities to the Permanent Council. We take this opportunity to reiterate our strong support and appreciation of the Mission's role in supporting the reform efforts of your country, in line with its mandate and the reform priorities. We encourage you to make full use of the OSCE's expertise. We hope that a strong relationship with your Government will enable the Mission, in cooperation with the autonomous institutions, to develop and enhance its activities in several areas, such as democratic governance and support to electoral processes, the rule of law, inclusive parliamentary processes, the independence of the judiciary, media freedom, combating hate crime and combating violent extremism.

The EU stands ready, with other relevant actors, to support the country in its efforts, with all instruments at its disposal.

Thank you, Minister Dimitrov, for being with us today and for updating us on the situation in your country and the prospects for the future.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

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