



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1478 Vienna, 13 June 2024**

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Jan Braathu**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ambassador Braathu and thanks him for his comprehensive report.
2. Against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms, we underscore the role of OSCE and its field operations in actively safeguarding and promoting security and stability across the OSCE area.
3. We take good note of Serbia's humanitarian and other assistance to Ukraine as well as of the fact that Serbia joined other participating States in invoking the OSCE Moscow Mechanism in 2024 with regard to the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainians by Russia. At the same time, we reiterate our strong expectation of Serbia, in line with its negotiating framework, to step up its efforts towards full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, including restrictive measures on Russia and Belarus, as a matter of utmost priority. Preventing the circumvention of EU restrictive measures adopted in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is of paramount importance. In this regard, we welcome Serbia's improved cooperation with the EU and encourage Serbia to continue with these efforts.
4. We highlight the important expertise and support the Mission provides to Serbia at all levels, under budgetary constraints, in the mandated areas of rule of law, human rights and rights of persons belonging to national minorities, media, good governance and law enforcement.

5. We note the final report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the December 2023 early parliamentary elections, as well as the statement of preliminary conclusions issued by the ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the June 2024 local elections. We stress that key aspects of the electoral process require tangible improvement and further reform. Full implementation of all ODIHR recommendations remains an immediate priority for Serbia. All recommendations must be effectively addressed and the EU remains ready to support the competent authorities in implementing them.
6. We highly value the continued assistance provided by the Mission with regard to the implementation of the 2022 constitutional amendments aiming at strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary. We particularly commend the Mission's efforts to advance the process of judicial reform and support capacity building. We underline the importance of rigorous and immediate implementation and stress that the independence and overall efficiency of the judiciary need to be improved.
7. We highlight the Mission's activities to improve the overall environment for freedom of expression and the independence of the media. We welcome the support provided to implement the national Media Strategy and take note of the adoption of two reform media laws foreseen by the Strategy, which brought several legislative improvements but need to be amended to ensure full alignment with the EU acquis and European standards. We also commend the Mission's work to improve the safety of journalists and encourage the host country to address the increasing cases of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists promptly and more rigorously. We appreciate the Mission's activities to improve transparency and professionalism in media reporting as well as on media literacy. Overall, we encourage Serbia to step up efforts on the effective implementation of its Media Strategy, respecting the letter and spirit of the latter's objectives. We also reiterate the call on Serbia to actively engage in preventing and tackling all forms of disinformation and foreign information manipulation in all media channels.
8. We highly appreciate the Mission's work in monitoring war crimes proceedings, within the framework of the relevant EU-funded project. The EU continues to underscore the importance of meaningful regional cooperation in the domestic handling of war crimes, resolving the remaining cases of missing persons and full cooperation with the

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, including by fully accepting and implementing its rulings and decisions as a matter of urgency. Support and public space for convicted war criminals or the glorification or denial of their crimes are unacceptable.

9. We stress the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations as a prerequisite for stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and overcoming legacies of the past. In this respect, we welcome that Serbia has maintained its commitment in a number of regional cooperation initiatives, resulting in positive tangible results. We encourage Serbia to further strengthen good neighbourly relations and contribute to stability and reconciliation with all partners in the region.
10. We commend the Mission's efforts to strengthen the capacities of Serbian authorities to fight effectively corruption and money laundering, as well as to tackle organised crime and take action against human trafficking. We underline the need for Serbia to step up its efforts in the fight against corruption and organised crime and achieve tangible results and a convincing track record with effective investigations, prosecutions, final convictions, freezing and confiscation of criminal assets.
11. We underline that Serbia needs to continue to pay particular attention to full respect for fundamental rights, including the protection of persons belonging to the most vulnerable groups, as well as the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, in line with the international standards and bilateral agreements. Tangible improvements are still needed in the effective exercise of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, especially in the areas of education, use of minority languages, access to media and religious services in minority languages. Representation in public administration and representative bodies is also important. Investigations and convictions for hate-motivated crimes should be pursued actively. We reiterate our call for effective implementation of the relevant strategic documents.
12. We stress the importance of the Mission's continued engagement in the areas of gender equality and youth participation, including through the OSCE Dialogue Academy for

Young Women. We also commend the Mission's work on environmental protection, especially with regard to environmental legislation and governance.

13. The EU underlines that progress in the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina remains essential for both in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region. We expect both to engage constructively. The Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex, adopted in February and March 2023, offer a clear platform for advancing the normalisation of relations. The obligations stemming from this Agreement remain valid and binding, and have been incorporated in their respective European paths. Its implementation is urgent and crucial for the stability of the entire region. We call on both sides to fully implement all obligations and past commitments without delay or preconditions, including the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities in Kosovo<sup>1</sup>. We expect Serbia to deliver on its own pending Dialogue obligations in parallel.

14. The EU expects Serbia to fully cooperate and take all the necessary measures to apprehend and swiftly bring to justice the perpetrators of the violent acts by Kosovo Serbs protesters against citizens, KFOR troops, law enforcement, and media on 29 May 2023, and the violent attack against Kosovo Police in the north of Kosovo on 24 September 2023.

15. We reiterate the EU's unequivocal support to Serbia's European Union perspective and its readiness to assist Serbia in advancing its reform agenda and in tackling the remaining challenges. We welcome the overall progress made so far, and we encourage further and more focused efforts to accelerate reforms and deliver concrete and tangible results in the identified key areas.

16. In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our strong support for the Mission and thank Ambassador Braathu and his dedicated team for their important work.

The Candidate Countries TÜRKIYE, NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, the EFTA countries ICELAND and

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<sup>1</sup> \* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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