



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1429 Vienna, 22 June 2023**

#### **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 on the Mission's activities.
2. Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine has disastrous consequences for the people in Ukraine, the OSCE region and beyond. Against this backdrop, we highlight the role of OSCE and its field operations in actively safeguarding and promoting security and stability across the OSCE area.
3. Whilst we note positively that Serbia joined other participating States in invoking the OSCE Moscow Mechanism on three occasions, in 2022 and 2023, including with regard to the human rights and humanitarian impacts of Russia's illegal war of aggression on the people of Ukraine, we expect Serbia, in line with its negotiating framework, and as all EU candidate countries, to step up its alignment with EU positions, including High Representative's statements, declarations and in particular restrictive measures, including those directed against Russia and Iran. Preventing the circumvention of EU restrictive measures adopted in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is of paramount importance.
4. We underline the important assistance and expertise the Mission provides to Serbia at all levels, as well as its cooperation and interaction with the local authorities and civil society. We commend the consistent efforts of the Mission to support the host country's capacities to implement OSCE commitments in the mandated areas of rule of law,

human rights and rights of persons belonging to national minorities, media, good governance and law enforcement. We highlight the work to promote inclusive policy-making, as well as to integrate systematically both the gender and youth perspectives across the Mission's activities.

5. The EU stood in solidarity with Serbia after last month's mass shootings. We express our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and the Serbian nation. In partnership with the OSCE, the EU has been supporting arms control and arms control capacity building in the Western Balkans, notably within the framework of the Regional Roadmap for comprehensive Small Arms and Light Weapons control in the Western Balkans. In this regard, we welcome the Mission's support to the launch of a public firearms surrender campaign by the Serbian Government and its contribution to school police training, also within the context of implementing the series of measures announced following the tragic incidents. We support efforts towards eradicating gun violence with due respect to democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights.
6. We note the final report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the April 2022 presidential and early parliamentary elections. We welcome that Serbia addressed some long-standing ODIHR recommendations through legislative amendments, but stress that key aspects of the electoral process require further reform.
7. We welcome the adoption of legislation as a follow-up to the 2022 constitutional amendments aiming at strengthening the independence of the judiciary. We underline the importance of rigorous implementation and stress that the independence and overall efficiency of the judiciary need to be improved.
8. We highlight the Mission's activities to improve the overall environment for freedom of expression and the independence of the media, impacting voters' possibilities to make fully informed electoral choices. We particularly welcome the support provided to the Permanent Working Group for Safety of Journalists and encourage the host country to address cases of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists more rigorously. We also commend the Mission's work on media literacy, including with regard to children and youth. Overall, we call on Serbia to implement effectively its media strategy action plan as a matter of priority, respecting the letter and spirit of the media strategy's objectives.

9. 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.
10. 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, including the three agreements on mobility signed in November 2022.
11. 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 achieve further tangible results, notably as regards serious and organised crime cases.
12. 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.
13. 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.

14. 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.

15. In line with the Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU of 3 June, we urge both Kosovo\*<sup>1</sup> and Serbia to immediately and unconditionally take measures to de-escalate, stop using divisive rhetoric and refrain from any further uncoordinated actions. Calm needs to be restored urgently. The EU is ready to implement resolute measures. Failure to de-escalate the tensions will lead to negative consequences. The EU expects both Kosovo and Serbia to act responsibly and engage immediately in the EU-facilitated Dialogue to find a sustainable solution to the situation in the north of Kosovo that guarantees safety, security and participatory democracy for all citizens and paves the way for the implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Annex. This includes starting without any further delay or precondition the work to establish the Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities.

16. In conclusion, we thank you, Ambassador Braathu, for your important work and wish you and your team every success in your endeavours.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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

---

<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.