



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 1091 Vienna, 3 March 2016

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#### **EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, H.E. Ambassador Janina Hřebíčková**

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The European Union and its Member States warmly welcome Ambassador Janina Hřebíčková, Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, back to the Permanent Council. We thank her for her report.

We commend Montenegro's continued progress in the accession negotiations with the European Union. During the last year, Montenegro has made a number of important legislative and institutional improvements.

It is important for the country to continue investing clear and serious efforts in the effective implementation of rule of law reforms and to ensure that they achieve the best results on the ground. In this context, we highlight the importance to meet all obligations in the action plans for chapters 23 and 24. We trust that Montenegro will maintain the current dynamics of the accession process and will pay attention not to halt the adoption and effective implementation of EU accession related reforms in the election year.

We trust that all political parties will demonstrate responsibility and contribute constructively to the on-going process of political dialogue, with parliament being the key forum for political debate, also to ensure full public confidence in the electoral process and state institutions as the country moves towards Election Day.

With regard to electoral preparations, the new electoral legislation, adopted in 2014, needs to be implemented in a timely and thorough manner, including on all issues relating to the electronic identification of voters. The judicial follow-up on the alleged abuse of public funds for party political purposes needs further efforts and remains to be completed. We recognise the important role the Mission is playing in providing

assistance to strengthening the capacities of the State Electoral Commission. In this respect, we strongly encourage the Mission to establish as soon as possible a donor co-ordination sector working group on elections in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to strengthen information sharing.

We take positive note of improvements in the legal framework in the area of the rule of law, which is central to the new approach of accession negotiations. We also welcome the work carried out on the establishment of new institutions. The reforms now need to be consistently implemented and lead to a change of the reality on the ground.

We commend the establishment of the Special State Prosecutor's Office, as a specialised body to investigate and prosecute organised crime and corruption as well as the establishment of the Anti-corruption Agency. The Office of the State Prosecutor has made a positive start in its work. That said, further progress is needed to develop a solid and credible track record of investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in criminal cases as well as effective detection, follow up and sanctioning of irregularities in the area of prevention of corruption. We welcome the support by the Mission in the area of the rule of law.

We encourage Montenegro to continue close co-operation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media in order to achieve further efforts in realizing freedom of expression, including by ensuring safety of journalists. It is important for all cases of violence against journalists, including the 2004 murder case, to be fully processed and perpetrators brought to justice. In the same regard, we continue to value the Mission's active role in assisting the media in establishing solid professional and ethical standards and efficient self-regulation, also in close co-operation with the Representative on Freedom of the Media. We also welcome the sixth meeting of the Sub-Committee on Justice, Freedom and Security next week in Podgorica as an occasion to take stock and assess progress in the area of the rule of law.

Mr. Chairperson, we welcome the wide range of Mission activities across the three dimensions, including in areas such as combatting trafficking in human beings, police reform, demilitarisation, gender equality, vulnerable groups and human displacement. We appreciate its focus on the engagement of civil society in the

reform processes. And we value the Mission's close co-operation with the international community and its continued active role in the region.

After the strategic review of programmatic activities in 2015, we encourage the Mission to continue developing a focused approach on the most relevant priorities in the coming years. We would be grateful if Ambassador Hřebíčková could set out in more detail the outcome of the strategic review and where the Mission intends to focus its effort.

We underline that for all field operations effective evaluation is essential to ensure efficient use of resources. We encourage the Mission to focus its reporting at outcome level – on results and follow-up – as well as on ensuring continuous evaluation. To that end, we would be grateful if Ambassador Hřebíčková in these reports could highlight some of the key impacts of the Mission's programmatic work during this reporting period, as well as providing information on what is planned by way of evaluation during the next year.

We highly value the positive role Montenegro is playing in the region, advancing regional co-operation and further developing good neighbourly relations, including the recent signing of border agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*. We acknowledge the significant progress the country has made on its path to European and Euro-Atlantic integration, especially in light of the recent invitation to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which is an important step in further stabilising Southeast Europe.

Finally, we thank you, Ambassador, for your presentation and wish you and your team success in your work in the coming year.

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 countries ICELAND and NORWAY align themselves with this statement.

\* The FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.