



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1488 Vienna, 19 September 2024**

#### **EU Statement in response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Michel Tarran**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Michel Tarran to the Permanent Council and thanks him for this 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, the role of the OSCE and its field operations continue to be imperative in promoting and safeguarding security and stability across the OSCE area. Albania's unequivocal condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is testimony to its strong commitment to the European values we share. We commend Albania's full alignment with EU CFSP declarations, statements and restrictive measures. We also welcome our intensified cooperation in other multilateral and regional organisations, including in the UN, where Albania played a very active role as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in promoting and defending the rules-based international order, and currently as a member of the UN Human Rights Council.
3. We congratulate the Presence for its continued and effective work across the three Dimensions, carefully tailored to the country's priority needs. We welcome its cross-dimensional, whole-of-society approach, its engagement at central and local levels, its partnership with the Albanian institutions, and its efforts to mainstream gender, youth

and regional perspectives across programmes, in complementarity and cooperation with OSCE structures and autonomous institutions, as well as international partners. The EU welcomes Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence and the long-standing co-operation between the Presence and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania.

4. The EU welcomes Albania's continued engagement in regional cooperation, including by holding the chair of relevant regional initiatives and organisations – BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation), SEECP (South-east European Cooperation Process) and CEI (Central European Initiative). We note the contacts with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential.
5. We commend the support provided by the Presence in key areas for the host country, such as: democratisation; enhancing the rule of law and support for the ongoing comprehensive justice reform; combating organised crime and corruption; promoting media freedom; environmental governance.
6. The EU welcomes the Presence's comprehensive efforts to support the country in tackling international organised crime, including through activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of the national law enforcement agencies. We also welcome the Presence's contribution to address trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the region, and we recall our support for the implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of SALW in the Western Balkans. Against the backdrop of frequent cyber incidents, we welcome the Presence's intensified efforts in cyber security education and awareness, also in cooperation with other field missions and with the involvement of youth.
7. We particularly welcome the Presence's contribution to strengthening the rule of law and supporting the ongoing comprehensive justice reform, including the expanded assistance to the Constitutional Court, the High Judicial Council and the Special Court against Corruption and Organised Crime. We commend Albania on the good progress

overall made through the continued implementation of the justice reform, stressing the need for further progress, notably with regard to the quality of the judiciary. Reforms should be based on the goals of the 2016 justice reforms and international standards. Securing solid and irreversible achievements, including in the area of rule of law, remains decisive for meeting the requirements of EU membership. We welcome that the vetting process has continued to advance steadily and produced tangible results. We also welcome the support of the Presence to anti-corruption efforts, by strengthening public officials' capacities in auditing fraud, misuse of public funds and investigating and adjudicating corruption offences in public procurement and concessions. The swift and full implementation of final court verdicts, including judgments by the Constitutional Court, remains essential. We look forward to continued cooperation with the OSCE Presence in the context of the implementation of the EU-funded Regional Trial Monitoring project.

8. We recall the importance of media freedom and pluralism, of ensuring media independence and impartiality, including both public and private media, as well as safety of journalists. We continue to call on Albania to make tangible progress in this area and encourage the Presence to continue its support to authorities and media actors.
9. Ahead of the 2025 parliamentary elections, we commend the activities of the Presence, together with ODIHR, in support of electoral reform. We also commend the commitment of the Albanian authorities in advancing the reform and underline the importance of addressing all remaining OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.
10. The EU emphasises the importance of activities aimed at strengthening the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as at combating trafficking in human beings. We welcome the assistance provided for the development of a new anti-trafficking National Action Plan and in the implementation of the recently approved National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking. We reiterate the need to continue the activities aimed at promoting effective policies concerning the protection of

rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and promoting the improvement of the legal framework in this regard, to address the gaps that have been identified. Furthermore, we welcome the adoption of the secondary legislation on minorities and continue to urge Albania to swiftly adopt and implement the remaining by-laws relating to the 2017 framework law on the protection of persons belonging to national minorities. We also call for enhanced efforts to consolidate property rights.

11. The EU reaffirms its commitment to enlargement, which remains a key policy of the European Union. The EU expresses its full and unequivocal commitment to the European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits.

12. In conclusion, we wish Ambassador Tarran and his able team every success in their activities.

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

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