



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1480 Vienna, 4 July 2024

#### **EU Statement in Response to the Head by the OSCE Mission in Montenegro, Ambassador Dominique Waag**

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Dominique Waag back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for the 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 promoting and safeguarding security and stability across the OSCE area.
3. We welcome Montenegro's strategic commitment to our common European values, demonstrated through full alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy, including adoption of EU restrictive measures following Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
4. Last week, the 16<sup>th</sup> EU-Montenegro Intergovernmental Conference marked the progress made by Montenegro in meeting the interim benchmarks set by the EU in the area of Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights. We congratulate the Government of Montenegro for delivering progress on its EU path within eight months of taking office. Now Montenegro must maintain the reform momentum, which will require sustained political stability and cross-party consensus, to deliver its citizens' expectation of joining the European Union.

5. We commend the Mission's work in three priority areas: Security Cooperation and Governance, Democratisation, and Media and are pleased that the Mission was able to continue implementation of its programmatic activities despite the lack of an approved OSCE Unified Budget. We welcome the mission's regular dialogue with the new government, state institutions and civil society related to moving forward on the wider reform agenda. We would appreciate it if you could elaborate more on the new strategic plan that is being developed.
6. We highly appreciate the Mission's continued support to Montenegrin institutions, particularly in enhancing the capacities of the police and judiciary to prevent and combat serious and organised crime, transnational threats, human trafficking, and the misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). We welcome in particular the contribution of the Mission to the implementation of the EU-funded OSCE Regional Trial Monitoring Project in the Western Balkans, which contributes to strengthening the Rule of Law.
7. We also welcome the Mission's co-operation with the newly elected Parliament, especially in fostering gender equality and ensuring greater transparency. In this context, we highlight the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in political life and welcome the mission's continued activities in support of a more inclusive parliament. While we commend the Mission's support to the State Election Commission (SEC), which resulted in efficiently managed elections, we see that a number of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed. We therefore encourage the host country to work closely with the Mission to make progress on the electoral framework, in line with ODIHR's recommendations.
8. In the field of media, we welcome the Mission's cooperation with the Agency for Electronic Media in fostering media literacy. We also commend the continued work on promoting freedom of information, as well as the professionalism and safety of journalists. We deplore that the online harassment of women journalists remains a concern and commend the Mission's cooperation with the Commission for

Monitoring Attacks against Journalists and Media Property to improve the Commission's reporting capacities.

9. We also value the cross-programmatic work of the Mission, particularly its focus on gender mainstreaming, youth engagement and the environment as well as the mission's activities in support of regional cooperation.
  
10. The EU reaffirms its commitment to enlargement, which remains a key policy of the European Union. We reiterate the EU's unequivocal support for 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. Montenegro's recent positive results sends a strong political signal that the EU is ready to move forward with candidate countries when they successfully fulfil the required steps. Continued commitment to EU values and necessary reforms, as well as fostering good neighbourly relations, are essential in the enlargement process.
  
11. In conclusion, we would like to thank you, Ambassador Waag, for your vital work during your term in office and wish you and your dedicated team every success.

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

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