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OSCE Permanent Council No. 1334 Vienna, 2 September 2021

EU Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco

Final (853 words)

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Del Monaco back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for presenting his annual report.
2. For more than twenty years, the OSCE Presence in Albania has made an important contribution to fostering peace, security and economic development of Albania. The EU very much welcomes Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence and encourages the continuation and development of meaningful projects across the three Dimensions. We commend the Presence for its adaptability and responsiveness to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the challenging circumstances.
3. We welcome the systemic, cross-dimensional approach followed by the Presence and its priorities. We recognise the important role played by the Presence in key priority reform areas for the country, including the reform of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the fight against organized crime and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
4. We particularly commend the contribution of the Presence to the substantial reform process of the justice sector. The EU welcomes progress on judicial reform and highlights key achievements, notably the successful vetting of judges and prosecutors with the thorough monitoring of the Commission through the International Monitoring Operation and the fact that the Constitutional Court regained its quorum, with fully vetted members. We stress the importance of continuing with the appointments of judges in the High Court, which is fully



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functional. We also look forward to close cooperation with the OSCE Presence in Albania in the context of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project.

5. We welcome the Presence's active role and fruitful partnership with the EU Delegation in Albania on media freedom. The EU commends the engagement and monitoring by the Presence of two important draft laws on media and anti-defamation, as well as its close co-operation with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on this matter. We recall the importance of the independence and impartiality of the media and of the main media regulatory body. We also stress the importance of respecting the diversity of opinions and media in the country. In this context we therefore welcome the active contribution of the Mission to the regional OSCE media conference which will take place in October.
6. We welcome the overall good conduct of the April parliamentary elections and the final report on the Limited Election Observation Mission, circulated by OSCE/ODIHR. The elections followed the cross-party agreement of 5 June 2020 that led to wide-ranging electoral reform, in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The EU commends the important role played by the Presence in assisting the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Albania in organising the elections, as well as the excellent coordination with the EU Delegation in Albania. The EU welcomes that the new electoral administration gained the trust of most stakeholders.
7. The good cooperation between the Presence and the CEC was also reflected in the facilitation of electoral reform last year, ensuring more inclusive provisions of the Electoral Code. We encourage the Presence to continue to support the Central Election Commission in implementing ODIHR's recommendations, including remaining allegations related to the misuse of public resources or functions, vote buying, and the leaking of sensitive personal data, which are being investigated and will need to be followed-up.



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8. We commend the Presence's emphasis on partnership with the Albanian institutions in order to capitalise on its expertise and experience.
9. The EU also welcomes Albania's continued constructive engagement to regional cooperation, as well as the intensified dialogue with neighbouring countries to address important bilateral issues and to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential.
10. The EU emphasizes the importance attached to activities aimed at strengthening protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, media development and combating human trafficking. We reiterate the need to continue the activities aimed at promoting effective policies concerning protection of rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and promoting the improvement of the legal framework in this regard, to address the gaps which have been identified. Furthermore, we call for the swift adoption of the bylaws to the framework law on national minorities, namely on the right to free self-identification and on property rights, which has been significantly delayed.
11. We attach importance to gender mainstreaming as a cross-dimensional issue and commend the Presence for its continued work in this regard. We encourage the Presence to continue to enhance its work on gender equality and to expand the role of its Youth Advisory Group to boost the voice of women and youth in its programme development and implementation across all three Dimensions.
12. We recall our commitment to Albania's EU integration process and look forward to holding the first intergovernmental conference (ICG) as soon as possible after the adoption of the negotiating framework by the Council. We acknowledge the ongoing and long-standing co-operation between the Presence and the Delegation of the European Union to Albania and encourage further strengthening of this beneficial partnership.



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13. Finally, we remain committed to supporting the efficient implementation of the mandate of the Presence and we would like to wish Ambassador Del Monaco and his team every success in their activities.

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

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