

Head of OSCE Mission to Skopje: UK response, 7 April 2022

Thank you Chair. Welcome Ambassador Koja, and thank you to you and your team for the detailed report on the Mission's activities over the last year.

We recognise the difficult operating environment including those relating to the pandemic, in which the Mission carried out its work, and your achievements during this period. We note the challenges mentioned in the future outlook, and the as yet unclear implications for the region of Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine.

We appreciate the comparative advantage of the Mission in monitoring security-related developments across the country. This and your ability to take early action to address identified issues shows real value added.

We appreciate the Mission's achievements detailed in your report and would like to focus on three specific areas – social cohesion, professionalisation of law enforcement and gender.

Firstly on social cohesion – we welcome your assistance with the Government's National Strategy for one Society and Inter-culturalism, as well as your support to local Commissions for Inter-Community Relations, on which the Mission will provide follow up in the coming period. Education is also key here. The Mission's support for improving integrated education, including your assistance on a concept for secondary education that will contribute to legislative amendments on anti-discrimination, gender equality, inclusion and inter-ethnic integration is highly valuable. These are all essential elements in any society. Combating hate crimes is vitally important, and we welcome your support to police officers for educational campaigns in schools to address this.

Secondly on professionalism of the police, we are pleased to note the newly adopted code of ethics designed to combat corruption and misconduct. We welcome that the Mission facilitated a study visit to the United Kingdom for staff from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to learn about the UK's external oversight structures and police anti-corruption regimes.

Focussing on an inter-agency approach for addressing victims of trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence is essential. We welcome your training of a variety of professionals, including police officers, psychologists, sociologists and civil society organisations to protect the rights of victims and survivors, and of vulnerable migrants.

Thirdly, we commend the Mission on its activities over this period on gender. This includes on women's leadership and empowerment to deal with serious and organised crime, as well as recommendations leading to legislative revisions which, for the first time, include a definition of sexual extortion and categorising it as a criminal offence. We appreciate the Mission's meaningful

progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective into programmatic work, and the Participatory Gender Audit, the recommendations of which will be taken into account by the Mission.

Thank you Ambassador Koja for joining us today, and please pass on our appreciation to your team.

Thank you Chair.