

OSCE Head of Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina: UK response, 31 March 2022

Thank you Chair. Welcome Ambassador Kavalec, and thank you and your team for the comprehensive report and all your work over the preceding year.

Our discussions today take place against the dark shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which impacts on the security of all participating States in the OSCE, including in the Western Balkans.

Ambassador Kavalec, the work and added value of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be highly appreciated by the United Kingdom.

The risk of destabilisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains serious. We fully support Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We firmly support the High Representative, Christian Schmidt, EUFOR and our partners, especially your mission, as we work together with the Bosnian and Herzegovinian authorities to support the country's future. Threats of "de facto secession" and the dangerous and divisive nationalistic rhetoric over the reporting period only hurt the country and its citizens.

We underline the importance of reconciliation, peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans. The OSCE's Secretary General's visit in November last year, meeting all members of the Presidency was a clear demonstration of the OSCE's interest and role. I look forward to visiting myself.

I would like to highlight several of the Mission's areas of focus – on elections, hate motivated incidents, war crimes, and gender.

The UK recognises the support and advocacy of the Mission in reforming electoral processes, together with the International Community, NGOs, and partners in government. This is essential with general elections due to be held in October this year. We also welcome the work of the Mission, in co-operation with the NGO Pod Lupom, in strengthening the capacity of civil society to ensure impartial monitoring of elections in the four municipalities that held repeated and early elections in mid-2021. We continue to call on all parties to support necessary changes to electoral laws and processes, the lack of implementation should not prevent elections being held. We look forward to all citizens being able to enjoy their democratic rights by voting.

We welcome the Mission's work at the community level to develop system-wide solutions to prevent bias and hate motivated incidents and foster social cohesion. Likewise, your advocacy in schools to address divisive practices. Young people have the ability to be transformative in society, and it is essential that schools nurture inclusivity.

Breaking the culture of impunity is essential to addressing hate-motivated incidents. Your report mentions an increase in convictions under incitement to hatred charges. But we encourage institutions to do more to address hate motivated crimes adequately.

On War Crimes, we recognise your advocacy has led to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council agreeing to a greater role in monitoring implementation of the Revised National Strategy for the Processing of War Crimes.

Finally, I wanted to focus on gender, which is essential in all areas of your work. We appreciate you have strengthened gender mainstreaming across the Mission's nine field offices. Achieving gender equality is essential to more informed thinking and policies that benefit all of our populations. It is also a human right.

Mr Chair – to conclude – At this critical and dangerous time for Europe and European security, it is as important as ever to focus our efforts on building a peaceful, prosperous and thriving Bosnia and Herzegovina that benefits all of its people. Please be assured of the UK's support in working towards that goal and supporting the work of the OSCE in making it a reality.

Thank you Chair