

# OSCE Head of Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina: UK response

Thank you Chair

Ambassador Kavalec, thanks to you and your team for your detailed report.

We recognise the challenges of operating during a global pandemic, and we welcome the assistance that the Mission has continued to provide to Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout this period, including on pandemic related work, such as supporting continued access to learning for vulnerable children, and your direct assistance to safe houses for survivors of gender-based violence to ensure that they can continue to offer their services.

I would like to focus on three areas in your report – elections; good governance; and combating discrimination and hate speech.

One of the positives of 2020 was the holding of local elections in Mostar on 20 December, the first since 2008, demonstrating what is possible where dialogue and political will exists. And, of course, local elections also took place on 15 November.

The Mission continued to provide valuable political and technical assistance to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), in cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), to support the CEC to overcome the specific challenges it faced last year. Additionally, the lower incidence of divisive rhetoric noted in your Report, following the Mission's support for the development and signing of election pledges in 27 locations, is a positive development.

We will need to continue to work together to tackle this persistent problem in political life. The opportunity to hear first hand from Mr Dario Jovanović on the observation experience of NGO coalition Pod Lupom at yesterday's informal briefing was much appreciated. 2021 will be important for progressing election reform, and we strongly support the Mission's continued support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, through their expertise, advocacy and facilitation.

We note that the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency reaffirmed its commitment to the 14 key priority areas identified in the EU Commission's 24 March Opinion, and we welcome the Mission's continued assistance on a range of Good Governance issues. This includes on conflict of interest legislation, on highlighting the impunity syndrome and ethical crisis in the judiciary, and through the recommendations in Judge Korner's 2020 follow up report on Improving War Crimes Processing at the State Level.

On combating discrimination and hate speech, it was great to see that the Mission's advocacy efforts led to the appointment of a National Point of Contact on Hate Crimes. We welcome too your role in the development of

guidelines for a judicial database to improve courts' performance on discrimination cases and your work with schools in addressing discrimination.

With the aim of achieving reconciliation and an environment of mutual respect for all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, your support and advocacy, together with that of the International Community, continues to be highly valued. We recognise the impact that initiatives, such as the Mission-produced documentary "Maglaj: War and Peace" can have in helping to build sustainable peace. The UK continues to focus on these issues, especially as we prepare for the Berlin Process meetings this summer. We also value the OSCE's work on Media Freedom – essential for any inclusive society.

Finally, we welcome your extensive work on gender that underpins all of the Mission's work. This includes on women's political participation, UNSCR 1325, and in addressing the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups of women. We welcome the Mission's Gender Action Plan for 2020-2022, and highlight the importance of mainstreaming gender into all Mission programmes. We would welcome hearing more on the gender diversity of those engaged through Mission programmes.

Thanks again to you, Ambassador Kavalec, for the Mission's report, and please also convey our thanks to your team.