

OSCE Mission in Kosovo: UK Statement

Thank you Chair

The UK welcomes Ambassador Braathu to the Permanent Council. We thank you and your team for the comprehensive Report.

Ambassador Braathu – we recognise that the Mission's progress has been achieved during the exceptional circumstances of a global pandemic. Your continued support and advocacy during these unprecedented times is highly valued. We recognise that the Mission has helped to enable all communities in Kosovo gain access to information through the Mission's monitoring and assisting with language compliance. This is of crucial importance at any time, but even more so in relation to COVID-19.

We also welcome that the Mission raised awareness on the new laws on access to public documents and protection of personal data. At the same time, we recognise that the Mission has needed to adjust its own working methods as a result of the global pandemic, whilst continuing to provide support in Kosovo.

I would like to reiterate our appreciation for the Mission's timely reporting on key developments, and the value we attach to your spot reports, as part of the OSCE's Early Warning.

I will now turn to three areas in your Report – on displaced persons and property rights, gender and democratic institutions and oversight, including through freedom of media.

Firstly – on displaced persons, including your engagement with other international actors. And, here I would mention the work with UNHCR on the needs of displaced persons in the context of COVID-19. This occurred through facilitating bilateral meetings with representatives from Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristine, and Skopje. We hope that a housing and solutions process for the Kosovo displaced can be found.

Your Report also mentions the Mission's advocacy work on protection of property rights for non-majority communities, displaced, and vulnerable communities. This resulted in the approval of two legislative acts to further strengthen property rights, which we welcome. We also welcome the extensive monitoring carried out by the Mission in the Decan/Decani Special Protective Zone during this period. And we refer to the Quint statement of 27 August, as noted in the Report.

Secondly – we commend the efforts of the Mission in promoting gender equality and in addressing gender-based and domestic violence. A highlight of your advocacy and support in this period includes the vote by the Assembly of Kosovo to incorporate the Istanbul Convention into the Constitution.

The range of other work undertaken on gender is also welcome, including to overcome gender stereotypes, as well as in facilitating the sustainability of

domestic violence shelters and increasing awareness of how victims can seek help, particularly relevant given the increased number of incidents during the pandemic. We would welcome hearing some of the lessons learnt and best practice from the roundtables to combat gender stereotypes.

Thirdly – Your support for democratic institutions and oversight arrangements is critical. Media literacy and Safety of Journalists rightly receives your attention. We welcome the Mission's support to improve media literacy, including through broadcasts on the role of the public in countering disinformation and assessing media, as well as through lectures on media literacy to students.

However, as your Report notes, there has been an eight per cent increase in threats or attacks committed against journalists in the period from March to September, bringing the number for this period to 19. It is essential to continue addressing impunity for crimes committed against journalists, including those killed or missing since the conflict, as well as measures to prevent threats and violence against journalists. Such attacks are wholly unacceptable. We appreciate that the Mission takes action, such as in your joint statement with RFOM that condemned the physical attack on the Director of TV Puls on 27 April.

On 14 October, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Local Government Administration, briefed us in Vienna. This was an excellent opportunity for delegations to hear first-hand from one of your interlocutors about the value of your work on the ground. We look forward to further briefings from Kosovo interlocutors during the next reporting periods.

I would like to reiterate that the UK continues to support Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We welcome the relaunch of the EU-led Dialogue facilitated by EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak, as well as recent progress achieved in Washington towards greater economic cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia. Progress in the Dialogue and towards wider reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia will require both parties to take steps to implement agreements reached, and establish and protect a rational and calm atmosphere to allow cooperation.

The UK is clear that all, but particularly those in positions of power and authority, have a responsibility to refrain from provocative and/or harmful rhetoric. The UK stands ready to support a comprehensive and sustainable normalisation agreement between Kosovo and Serbia that respects territorial integrity, and benefits the people of both countries. All here I am sure, will share the determination to help bring the Dialogue to a successful conclusion, working in good faith and in a spirit of compromise between the two sides.

In concluding, I would like to thank you personally, Ambassador Braathu, for your outstanding leadership of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo over the last four years, and to wish you all the best in your next endeavours.