

OSCE Mission to Serbia: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chair – The UK welcomes Ambassador Orizio to the Permanent Council. We thank you for the comprehensive Report on the Mission's activities during the reporting period.

I would like to start by congratulating the Mission and its staff for their continued assistance to Serbia on its reform path, and welcoming their strong focus on media freedom and anti-corruption. The Mission's work has also been commendable in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which the Mission has deftly adapted its programme in order to support Serbia. We welcome the many activities that have enabled immediate support for the most vulnerable groups in Serbia, and for the important monitoring of the impact of the Covid-19 State of Emergency on democracy, human rights, and media freedom.

We welcome the participation of the OSCE and ODIHR in working groups established by the Government of Serbia to improve electoral conditions. However, another immediate challenge of the ongoing pandemic will be the elections scheduled for 21st June. We recognise the importance of independent election observation to the continued democratic development of all participating States, including through the recommendations that form part of the final report. We strongly support election-related activity by ODIHR for the upcoming election, but recognise the practical challenges this will present.

Mr Chair – I would like to comment on a few of the highlights in the Report.

Firstly – on media freedom, the UK welcomes the Government's adoption of the Media Strategy in January this year, the implementation of which, as the report notes, will be crucial in ensuring a healthier media environment. The Mission's focus on safety of journalists is vital, and we are encouraged by the percentage decrease in cases where the perpetrators of crimes against journalists remained unknown, following the Mission's joint training sessions with police, prosecutors and journalists.

Secondly – the UK also welcomes the achievements on anti-corruption, including through your expert support on prevention and repression, backed by the adoption of new pieces of legislation and strategic documents. As ever, the implementation of these laws will be crucial. Your assistance, such as with the development of risk analysis guidelines, and in partnering with the international community to enhance the capacity of the police to investigate cases of corruption, clearly demonstrates the Mission's value on the ground in support of the Government's priorities. Further work and focus in this area will be of continued importance. This approach also saw Serbia's adoption of all relevant Financial Action Task Force (FATF) measures that enabled their removal from the FATF grey list.

Thirdly – We welcome your work on gender. Ensuring gender is mainstreamed into all programmatic activities is essential to enhancing impact and delivering more sustainable results on the ground. It also contributes to

greater prosperity and more sustainable peace. In particular, we appreciate your assistance in the implementation of Serbia's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, in this the twentieth anniversary year of the Resolution.

Mr Chair – this reporting period is unique, taking in as it does the challenges of operating during a global pandemic and lockdown situation. We appreciate that the Mission has risen to this challenge, including through tangible support to vulnerable groups to lessen the compounding impact of the current situation. And we would appreciate hearing more of your plans including, for example, on the increase in the dissemination of disinformation and misinformation that we've experienced during the Covid-19 crisis and the impact on domestic violence.

Finally, but by no means least, the UK welcomes the appointment of the OSCE's former CiO, Miroslav Lajčák as EU Special Representative for the Pristina-Belgrade Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, and the contribution he will make alongside international partners as we work together to encourage constructive dialogue, and development of positive relationships across the region. On the dialogue – We hope that a constructive way forward will soon be found.