

Report by Head of OSCE Presence in Albania: UK response, July 2022

Thank you Chair

Welcome back, Ambassador Del Monaco to the Permanent Council, and thank you for your comprehensive report highlighting the Presence's achievements over the last ten months.

During this period we were pleased to welcome Albania's membership of the UN Security Council, including their leadership of the UNSC in June.

We cannot escape the fact that this period has also been marked by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, an invasion which the UK strongly condemns. We welcome Albania's firm position, and note that the invasion has resulted in some challenges to Albania's Government priorities, including around the cost of living.

Turning to your report, I would like to focus on four key areas, namely: electoral reform, media freedom, anti-corruption, and the fight against serious organised crime and trafficking.

First – on electoral reform, we welcome your continued efforts to assist the reform process, a stated top priority of the Assembly of Albania. This includes the Presence's work with the Central Election Commission (CEC), including their objective of having the necessary infrastructure in place to support out of country voting by autumn 2023. We also appreciate your support to the CEC, together with OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), on drafting its first ever Code of Ethics. As mentioned previously, your support and advocacy for an inclusive approach to elections is highly valued. We were pleased that our Embassy in Tirana was able to join with the Presence and the CEC to encourage youth participation in electoral processes earlier this year. We continue to encourage further work on electoral reform, including by addressing [ODIHR recommendations](#), and we welcome the cross-partisan efforts of the new Assembly in this direction. This work is especially important ahead of the June 2023 local elections.

Secondly – we welcome your focus on media freedom in Albania. As your report notes, the Media Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders in May 2022, ranked Albania 103rd, dropping 20 places compared to 2021. Journalists should be able to report in a free and accurate way to hold those in power to account, expose corruption and inform citizens.

Thirdly – we commend your continued focus and expertise in addressing corruption, including to corruption-proof legislation. We welcome the work of the Special Prosecutor against Corruption (SPAK), which must continue to be supported. It is noteworthy that your report mentions the complex interplay between corrupt practices and gender inequality. Gender is integral in all that we do, and we appreciate your attention to this. We also welcome the

commitment of the Ministry of Justice/National Coordinator Against Corruption to follow up on the Presence's recommendations and to mainstream gender in the national anti-corruption strategy. As mentioned previously, we also encourage a focus on intersectional factors, and we are pleased that the OSCE is starting to increase its attention here.

Fourthly – on fighting serious organised crime and trafficking, we welcome your continued assistance in combating trafficking in human beings. We particularly note your support to innovative multi-sectoral training, addressing child trafficking, and on the Anti-Trafficking National Referral Mechanism Framework. Combating trans-national threats is vital for any government, and we appreciate your support in building the basis for Intelligence-led Policing to address serious and organised crime.

Looking ahead – we welcome the Presence's planned focus and we look forward to hearing more on your assistance to advance these areas, including on electoral reform, media freedom, good governance, serious organised crime and gender equality.

In concluding, I would like to thank you, Ambassador del Monaco, and your team for your hard work and commitment during the reporting period. We wish you the very best of luck in your future endeavours.

Thank you Chair