

Report by OSCE Head of Mission to Montenegro: UK response, June 2022

Thank you Chair.

Welcome Ambassador Waag to the Permanent Council. Thank you to you and your team for the Report on the Mission's activities. The UK values the work of the Mission and appreciates the achievements highlighted.

We recognise that the backdrop to the Mission's activities saw a number of challenges, both political and as a result of the ongoing pandemic. Yet, the Mission has continued to adapt and tailor its activities, and to further inclusivity and transparency through its online activities. Following the formation of a new Government on 28 April, we look forward to furthering progress in the year ahead. Prime Minister Abazovic's ambitions for reforms with respect to the rule of law reforms and his track record of tackling serious organised crime are a positive sign for progress in areas of significant importance to the Mission, while the series of elections due to take place in the next year underlines the importance of the Mission's work in this area.

I would particularly like to highlight the Mission's support and advocacy on elections, media freedom, and serious organised crime.

Firstly – on elections, we appreciate the Mission's strengthened cooperation with the State Election Commission, including to improve transparency, which is a long-standing ODIHR recommendation. We also commend the Mission's joint efforts with NGOs to make both electoral processes and polling stations accessible for people with disabilities ahead of the municipal elections – an essential step to facilitating voting by all and to furthering inclusivity.

It is, however, concerning to note that the political discourse in 2021 often led to a flood of comments on social media networks containing misinformation and hate speech. The Mission's work here, including with the technical working group on self-regulation, and with the Agency for Electronic Media, is greatly appreciated. Your work with journalists and NGOs to increase their understanding of gender aspects in investigative journalism is commendable. Safety of journalists, including women journalists, remains essential.

Thirdly, on serious organised crime, we welcome the Mission's assistance to strengthen the capability and accountability of the security sector to address serious threats and crime, whilst protecting public safety and human rights. I would also highlight here the Mission's annual public perception survey, which is a valuable tool for identifying perceptions and trends. It is encouraging to note that the findings of the survey show that belonging to an ethnic community is no longer an indicator of a negative attitude towards police.

Finally, the UK commends the Mission's work on gender, both within the

Mission's own activities, and in its support to Government, Parliament and other stakeholders. We encourage a sustained focus on gender throughout your activities.

In concluding, I reiterate our thanks to the Mission for their hard work and commitment, as well as their adaptability over the period.

Thank you Chair