

Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo: UK response

Thank you Madame Chair. Welcome Ambassador Davenport to the Permanent Council. It's a pleasure to have you with us in the Hofburg. Our thanks to you and your team for the comprehensive report. It highlights some significant achievements over the last six months.

Thank you also for the timely reporting on key developments. We attach great value to your spot reports as an important part of the OSCE's concept of Early Warning. I also would like to highlight the commendable work of your regional centres.

I want to focus on 4 areas – democratisation, including media freedom; gender; law enforcement capacity; and inter-ethnic relations.

Firstly, on democratisation. We appreciate the Mission's expertise and advice to the new Government on their legislative programme of work. This includes support to re-draft the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of Kosovo and the review of draft legislation designed to enhance compliance with human rights and rule of law standards.

With local elections scheduled for 17 October, we recognise the support you have already provided to strengthen electoral processes, including supporting workshops organised by the Central Election Commission. We would welcome some more detail of your plans, mentioned in your report, to work with municipalities after the elections.

Media freedom is at the heart of any democracy, and remains an essential area of focus. We appreciate the Mission's work to address the rise in fake news and misinformation (including in relation to COVID-19 and vaccines) through your work on media literacy and engagement with young people, as mentioned in your presentation today. This is an area of concern throughout the OSCE region. The safety of journalists is another essential issue

Secondly: on gender. We welcome the cross-cutting approach that the Mission rightly takes to gender. Your support for women's empowerment in political and public life is commendable, alongside your work in preventing gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and domestic violence. Your work in helping to ensure that shelters for women have the necessary language skills in order to assist women from minority communities is incredibly valuable.

The first conviction for conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo is an important step forward – both for survivors and for the domestic prosecution of war crimes from the conflicts of the 1990s.

Thirdly – we welcome your ongoing support to build capacity for the Kosovo Police, to combat serious organised crime. This includes your advice and

assistance on several strategies over the reporting period. Bringing together representatives from the Kosovo Police and the Special Prosecution Office, helped to identify weaknesses and gaps in policies and legislation, find possible solutions and increase cooperation between these important institutions. On 15 September, the Director General of the Kosovo Police, Mr Mehmeti, briefed us in Vienna. This was an excellent opportunity for delegations to hear first-hand from one of your stakeholders about the value of the Mission's work on the ground. We look forward to a further briefing from a Kosovo interlocutor in the next reporting period.

Fourthly – we thank the Mission for its continued work on tracking inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo; the Mission has become a trusted partner across communities and this work is a real area of strength. The UK has worked closely with the Mission on language in Kosovo and we look forward to continuing this cooperation into the next reporting period. We welcome the accreditation of the Balkanology course at the University of Pristina. While we condemn all incidents of inter-ethnic violence, we are encouraged that the trend is decreasing. This suggests important progress in this area, but as you said today – any case is one case too many. We would be grateful for any more information you are able to provide of the Mission's work in this area and in the field of community rights.

Finally, with international partners, we support the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo working towards a comprehensive and sustainable normalisation agreement that benefits the people of both countries.