

# Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia: UK response, May 2022

Welcome Ambassador Braathu, welcome Jan, and thank you to you and your team for the comprehensive Report. The UK values the work of the Mission and the achievements highlighted.

Your Report clearly sets out the political backdrop to the Mission's work. This includes the 16 January referendum that paved the way for constitutional amendments to strengthen the Judiciary, the opening of two EU negotiation clusters, as well as Presidential and early Parliamentary elections on 3rd April. We welcome that some previous recommendations by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) were taken into account for these elections, and we encourage a continued focus on responding to any shortcomings identified in the [ODIHR's final report](#).

On your report, Ambassador Braathu, we note the concerns about the polarised media scene and welcome the Mission's valuable advocacy and support. Media freedom is essential for the effective functioning of any democracy, and it is vital that journalists can carry out their work free of threats or physical attacks. We also note that during the reporting period over 300 journalists obtained free legal aid through the Mission-supported 24/7 helpline, and that the Mission produced video podcasts on safety of women journalists. It would be good to hear your further assessment on the impact and reach of these resources and any feedback received. I also commend the Mission's support for media literacy in schools, which is essential in today's digital world.

On war crimes, we have long been concerned about the appearance of murals and graffiti depicting convicted war criminal Ratko Mladic. We therefore welcome the Mission's work in supporting Serbia in taking action to secure accountability for war crimes.

Given the ethnic Albanian community concerns about passivization of addresses and the language used by some public officials and tabloids to describe the community, we welcome the Mission's advocacy for inclusive multi-ethnic representation. The Mission is well placed to provide support and expertise. We welcome its intercultural activities for youth from diverse ethnic communities. We also recognise the Mission's educational support – including its training programme to prevent discrimination against Roma children. The Mission's work, including at grassroots level, is commendable. We appreciate that you will offer support and expertise for the 2022 population census and for National Minority Council elections.

Ambassador Braathu, we greatly appreciate the Mission's focus on gender across its activities, including in relation to gender-based violence, gender-sensitive labour policies, and on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The value of achieving gender equality, and ensuring gender inclusive and responsive decision-making, is well known. We also highly value your work

with youth, including with the civil society organisation, the Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability, on election observation through the “Democracy Academy”.

Finally, as we said at the Permanent Council last week, the UK continues to support strongly the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, working towards a comprehensive and sustainable normalisation agreement that will be to the benefit of the people of both countries. It is vital that both sides refrain from any rhetoric or activity which may reduce the chances of constructive progress in the Dialogue. We value the continued work of EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak. It is incumbent on both Kosovo and Serbia to seize the opportunity for renewed, good-faith engagement in the Dialogue, honouring the Dialogue commitments they have made so far, and holding regular talks at all levels in a spirit of compromise, and openness to positive, imaginative solutions.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Ambassador Braathu, dear Jan, and your team for your support, commitment and hard work over the reporting period.

Thank you Chair