

UK statement in response to OSCE Head of Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Thank you Mr Chair

The UK welcomes Ambassador Kavalec to the Permanent Council. We thank you for the comprehensive Report on the Mission's activities over the last year.

We appreciate the Mission's hard work, assistance and advocacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This happens across a broad range of activities, including good governance, rule of law, political and security sector reform, media freedom, border security, preventing and combatting violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, and small arms and light weapons. Your engagement at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with the international community, is commendable. We recognise that progress during the reporting period has been more limited in some areas than you might have hoped, and that the reasons for this are laid out in the Report. I would like to focus on a couple of themes.

Firstly, your activities in support of bridging ethnic divides. The diversity of work you do here is extremely valuable in helping to build long-term stability, security and prosperity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Starting with childhood, the ethnically divided 'two schools under one roof' continues to be a visible example of discrimination. We welcome the support of the Mission to increase interaction between students in a number of these schools. We also welcome the development of guidelines and your support on their implementation to ensure that schools are able to recognise, prevent and combat discrimination. We hope this will become binding in all schools across the country. When ethnic tensions arise, as they did in January at the First Primary School Srebrenica, you were able to quickly respond to help calm tension and depoliticise the situation. This is a real strength of the Mission.

Young people are the country's biggest asset. More needs to be done to support them, and to counter the high levels of brain drain and youth unemployment that persists. The participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the PISA tests in 2018, and the subsequent discussion that was sparked by the results, could be an opportunity to work for positive change. We appreciate the Mission is helping to facilitate this. This includes a focus on teachers' competencies for both inclusive and quality education. It would be good to hear more about the difference that this is making on the ground.

Secondly, your support and advocacy on rule of law.

We recognise that progress was more limited in this area. We regret that the 'Expert Report' on Rule of Law issues, and its useful material for reform efforts, has so far not received sufficient attention. Similarly, responses to corruption, and bias-motivated incidents and hate crimes have also been

insufficient, while noting that the two hate crimes which were charged in 2019 are a positive development.

We appreciate your continued efforts in these areas. This includes your spot report in June last year which drew attention to weaknesses in the processing of war crimes cases. You launched a follow up assessment by Judge Joanna Korner QC on the work of the BiH Prosecutors Office. This will shed further light on the situation.

We support the key points expressed by the EU. Ensuring the rule of law is working effectively and upholding decisions of the Constitutional Court is essential. In concluding, I would like to add a few points.

Media freedom and the rights of journalists to work without fear, threats or violence continue to be a serious issue. Your Report speaks of 30 incidents involving journalists.

Amongst other worrying trends are violence against women in politics, and the lack of economic opportunities for women. Your report touches on the work of the Mission to address these, and we welcome that you will follow up on the Report from the CiO's Special Representative on Gender Issues.

Finally, we recognise the critical work the Mission does on reconciliation. 2020 marks the 25 year anniversaries of both Srebrenica and the Dayton Accord. We hope this can be a year for the country to come together and find common cause.

Thank you