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OSCE Permanent Council No. 1304 Vienna, 4 March 2021

EU Statement in Response to the acting Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, Ms. Siv-Katrine Leirtroe

The European Union warmly welcomes Ms. Siv-Katrine Leirtroe, Acting Head of the Mission to Montenegro in the Permanent Council, and thanks her for the report on the Mission's activities over the past year. We also thank Ambassador Maryse Daviet for her good work during this reporting period, and wish her well for the future.

We are pleased to learn that the Mission efficiently adapted its work and its activities to the challenging circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring the safety of the Mission's staff and providing its partners with the necessary technical equipment and training to enable them to function in this new environment.

We welcome the Mission's valuable support to the host country in achieving its national strategic objectives. We especially welcome the Mission's close cooperation with partner institutions and its result-oriented programmes in addressing three key priority areas: Democratization, Media and Security Co-operation and Governance.

As you outlined in the report, the parliamentary elections in Montenegro on 30 August took place in the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulted in a democratic transition of political power. We welcome the Mission's inclusive engagement with the State Election Commission to increase its capacity



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to administer elections, and encourage continued support to raise the standard of their work further, as well as the Mission's well-established co-operation with the Parliament to strengthen its personnel management capacities and transparency. While the elections were run in orderly manner, we note that a number of previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations remain to be addressed and urge the host country to undergo a comprehensive review of the electoral framework, in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

We commend the Mission's gender-responsive approach and its support to the Montenegrin institutions in their efforts to mainstream gender equality. We especially appreciate the Mission's support to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights (MHMR) in the evaluation of the Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality 2017-2021 and the drafting of a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025. We also welcome the Mission's activities to raise the awareness about domestic violence and its support to civil society and the Office of Ombudsman in this regard.

We welcome the Mission's close cooperation with the Regional Youth Co-operation Office (RYCO) by supporting its local branch office in fostering youth co-operation and engagement as well as the Mission's support to youth-related civil society organisations.

We welcome that the Mission continued to focus on the development of a free and pluralistic media sector, especially through its engagement in media literacy and the safety of journalists. We appreciate the cooperation with local partners such as the Union on Public Service Broadcasters to increase the local public broadcasters' visibility and outreach. We commend the Mission's work with journalists to expose them to the latest techniques and industry standards and to procure equipment for media houses. We encourage Montenegro to strengthen



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its efforts to promote and protect freedom of expression and the fight against disinformation.

In the field of security cooperation and governance, we welcome the assistance provided to Montenegrin institutions to develop a transparent and accountable security and public safety sector. We commend the Mission's support to the Police Directorate in its reform process and in drafting its strategic documents, while taking into account a gender-sensitive approach.

We appreciate the Mission's cross-programmatic approach for supporting Montenegrin institutions in combatting trafficking in human beings, preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism and combating the trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons. We welcome the progress made by Montenegro in line with the Joint Action Plan on Counterterrorism for the Western Balkans. We also support the implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of SALW in Western Balkans by 2024.

We welcome the launch of the EU-funded regional Trial Monitoring project, which will be implemented by the OSCE field missions across the region, including in Montenegro. This project marks a key step in the implementation of the EU 2018 Western Balkans Strategy and Sofia Priority Agenda. It will strengthen the EU's support to the fight against organised crime and corruption in the region and assist the authorities to strengthen the rule of law. We look forward to our close cooperation with the OSCE Mission on the ground to maximise the impact of the project.

The European Union remains fully committed to continue supporting Montenegro's EU accession process. We welcome Montenegro's overall progress



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in the EU accession negotiations and the opening of the last chapter on its path to EU membership. We underline the need for further progress on Montenegro's EU reform agenda, particularly in the critical areas of media freedom, fight against corruption and trafficking in human beings. We call on the Montenegrin new government to continue the country's steady path towards EU accession and not to reverse earlier achievements, notably in the area of rule of law. We also strongly welcome our consistent cooperation with Montenegro on foreign policy issues.

Finally, we thank you Ms. Siv-Katrine Leirtroe for your dedicated work and wish you and your team success in the coming year.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.