

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON SOUTH EAST EUROPE MARK
PRITCHARD FOR THE OSCE PA Bureau Meeting**

27 April 2020

Appointed Special Representative on South East Europe in July 2018, I am tasked with serving as the Assembly's focal point in South East Europe, promoting dialogue, and encouraging reconciliation and rehabilitation in the region. My mandate is also to:

- Promote dialogue in all segments of society, in particular at the parliamentary level, in order to encourage reconciliation and rehabilitation in South East Europe, and in particular in the Western Balkans, and to make a contribution to the transformation and building up of democratic institutions;*
- Maintain close contact with and serve as a focal point for the Assembly's work in the region in general and its participation in the activities of the Regional Cooperation Council in particular;*
- Advise and report back to the President on the situation in the region, in particular the development of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and with respect to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.*
- Communicate with relevant actors within the OSCE as well as PA Committees dealing with migration and terrorism who work on issues related to the region.*

Since my last address during the Winter Meeting, which took place on the 21-22 February 2020, I have continued to closely follow the situation in the region.

The proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic has already claimed approx. 1000 victims in the Western Balkans and inflicted a certain level of confinement and self-isolation measures to all OSCE participating States in the region. In addition, the pandemic has affected major electoral processes in North Macedonia and Serbia, with both countries postponing their parliamentary elections which had been scheduled for 12 and 26 of April respectively. As a result, the OSCE PA has cancelled the deployment of its election observation missions to both countries.

Despite the regrettable economic, political, social, and psychological hardship imposed on the region, the challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic,

also constitute an opportunity rather for advancing regional cooperation which should be supported by International actors.

In this regard, I welcome the decision by EU leaders to endorse in late March the opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. This decision contributes to the fulfillment of Albania's and North Macedonia's foreign policy priorities oriented towards EU integration, thereby enhancing stability and peace in the Western Balkans and the immediate neighborhood. I therefore look forward to fruitful and productive discussions ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Summit, which has also been postponed for later this year.

During the past 2 months, the region has witnessed another important development. In late March, North Macedonia became the 30th member of NATO. This came as a result of the joint efforts with its neighbor Greece concluded in the Prespa Agreement. I would therefore like to reiterate my confidence that both countries remain committed to the agreement and my belief that NM's NATO membership constitutes a historic step towards safeguarding security and stability for the region.

My activities as Special Representative also included a visit to Greece from the 4th to the 6th of March, aiming at exploring developments on regional cooperation, migration, and security issues. The visit was timely and fruitful and allowed extensive talks with high ranking representatives of Parliament, Government, as well as Political Parties, the International community, the media and civil society. During the 2-day visit, I had the opportunity to assess the emergency situation developing at the Greek-Turkish borders, while calling on the European Union to support Greece cope with the heightened migration influx also through burden sharing. I would like to thank the Greek Parliament and the Greek Government for their efforts in ensuring an extremely successful and productive visit.

Having followed closely developments in the EU-led Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, it is with great interest that I welcome the appointment of the former OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (*Note: Slovakia held the OSCE Chairmanship in 2019*), Mr. Miroslav Lajčák as the EU's Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues. I am confident his appointment would bring a new impetus that will allow the resumption of the dialogue efforts and I look forward to meeting him at the earliest possible occasion.

Moreover, I would also like to congratulate Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, Former Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), for his appointment as EU Commissioner for Crisis Management under EC President Von der Leyen. Such news are indicative of the importance and quality of work being conducted by all OSCE bodies, and a reminder of our responsibility as members of this Assembly, to enhance its capacity and visibility.

I will continue to follow the situation in the region and will keep you informed about further developments. I wish to all my strongest wishes for good health and courage during these challenging hours.