

Report by the Special Representative on South East Europe

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Since I last reported in December 2017, the region has continued to display a mixed picture. On the positive side, we have witnessed concrete actions and efforts by Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia aimed at resolving the name dispute between the two countries. In an effort to channel the negotiations in the most constructive avenue, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has, for instance, offered that it would cease to name its main airport and its main highway after “Alexander the Great”. Building on such unprecedented posturing, I sincerely hope that the process will continue to achieve momentum in the coming months given the crucial importance of this bilateral nexus for the region. A failure to make the best use of this unique window of opportunity would constitute a detrimental blow for the region.

Developments in Montenegro, Serbia and Albania have unfolded more or less as expected and unaccompanied by exceptional episodes. Montenegro has continued to prepare for its Presidential elections which are scheduled to take place on 15 April this year. As you are aware, President Tsereteli and the Assembly have decided not to observe these elections, which is a consequence of necessary prioritization taking into account limited resources and our busy election calendar for this first semester. This said, I nonetheless plan to follow the elections closely.

In January and in the context of a joint statement, the Presidents of Kosovo and Montenegro announced a new annex agreement concerning the border demarcation process between the two countries. This agreement undoubtedly benefits regional cooperation.

On the negative side, Kosovo Serb politician and leader of the “Civic Initiative SDP”, Oliver Ivanovic, was brutally murdered in north Mitrovica on 16 January. Together with President George Tsereteli, I issued a statement calling on law enforcement agencies to thoroughly conduct all necessary investigations so that those responsible can be brought to justice. Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, I am reassured to witness that both Belgrade and Pristina have reaffirmed their intention to continue dialogue and have so far avoided politicization of the issue. As OSCE PA we have to stay status-neutral – as does the whole organization. However, when there is no flexibility on both sides regarding our relationship with Kosovar institutions, and in particular the Assembly, it will remain difficult to engage in a meaningful way. Considering that the OSCE has one of its biggest missions there and is conducting many important activities, I regret that status-neutrality makes our much-needed work with all stakeholders so difficult.

I also regret to report that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to pose significant challenges both for domestic and international stakeholders. As Bosnia and Herzegovina approaches presidential and parliamentary elections in October this year, I am afraid that we will see a further increase in posturing and radical rhetoric from the main nationalist political forces at the expense of political and economic reforms. Those reform necessities include electoral

reforms which, in spite of clear recommendations by the ODIHR and by the European Court of Human Rights, remain to date regrettably unattended. A decision by the Constitutional Court of the country left elections without the necessary basis, and there is no agreement on a solution in sight. Like every time there is such an attempt ahead of elections in the region, we face the usual difficulties and blockades which could prevent a timely adoption of amended rules. Let us hope that this will not lead to more instability in the country. I have been approached by domestic and international stakeholders on the very topic of electoral reforms and am thinking of ways to promote dialogue on these issues. I will continue to closely follow the election related developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina given also the fact that our Assembly is preparing to deploy an Election Observation Mission.

As PA, we should continue our staunch support and encourage the ongoing dialogue between the countries of the Region. I very much welcome the decision of the EU to intensify its efforts to integrate the region. Such a decision was overdue. I have been calling for that since many years on every possible occasion. The response from the region should be the acceleration of social and economic reforms, including strengthening the rule of law and fighting corruption.