

The Head of Rule of Law Mission - EULEX, Gabriele Meucci

Prime Minister, EU Special Representative, Ambassadors, Ministers, Members of the International Community, Honoured Guests,

Thank you for coming.

This is my first reception hosted as the EULEX Head of Mission, and it's a privilege to see so many of you together in one room.

I'd like to take this occasion to share a few thoughts about EULEX's mandate in the coming year. Of course, we will continue to advise Kosovo institutions, support the implementation of the Dialogue, and function as embedded members of the judiciary- these are our responsibilities, assigned to us by the Member States and agreed with the Kosovo authorities.

It is my responsibility as Head of Mission to attend to the practicalities of leading EULEX in fulfilling these duties. We Italians are a people of poets, saints, and navigators; as I am neither a poet nor a saint, my role as Head of Mission is to steer the EULEX ship as we assist Kosovo on its European path.

Practically speaking, I have three navigational points:

First, EULEX must work to build realistic expectations from the public about rule of law and the judicial process.

In the Executive mandate – the “cases” – EULEX has accomplished a tremendous amount, yet we continue to see some brand this work “a failure”. From a rule of law perspective, if you have a case where both the prosecution and the defense presented their evidence, witnesses testified, and judges considered the evidence and reached a reasoned conclusion, it means that you have had a successful trial, regardless of the verdict. In most of the cases in which EULEX is involved, there are tens of thousands of pages of documents, scores of witnesses, and dozens of dossiers. Trials often take years to complete. And we've done more than 550 of these cases. This, by definition, must be considered a success. As our local counterparts take on challenging cases, I hope that Kosovo's citizens will have a realistic picture of the time, labour, and expense that is a necessary to ensure due process.

Second, EULEX must engage with the full spectrum of rule of law partners – not just public officials, but also civil society, citizens, and the press- and we must speak frankly.

As we approach 2016, progress will become harder – the tasks that remain are the most challenging and cannot be accomplished by EULEX alone, but only as a part of a larger context. Ours is the easiest part: as we let go, local counterparts must, at the same time, take increasing responsibility.

We will ask Kosovo citizens to do their part. We do not believe ourselves to be rule of law superheroes. To function optimally, Rule of law needs the engagement of the institutions, the press, and members of the public. In the next year and a half, EULEX will continue to run public communications campaigns to explain rule of law, to help the public better understand why we're here, and to request their commitment and responsibility.

Responsibility and accountability are critical. When I see reports where citizens have named officials who asked for bribes, or reports from officials against citizens who have offered bribes, I know that there has been progress towards accountability in Kosovo and there is a desire for a cleaner, better Kosovo. I ask Kosovo's people to continue to demand accountability from their public officials, just as I will continue to demand accountability from EULEX officials.

I will also continue to engage with the press. After this month's terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, and Germany, Freedom of the Press is very much on everyone's minds. I know that occasionally the media say unpleasant, impolite, and inconvenient things, sometimes even reporting about fabricated issues - but - that's part of having a free press.

Here in EULEX, we especially rely on the media to give voice to citizens' concerns and to challenge officials to work in the public good, but we investigate corruption with an eye to the truth rather than just a good story. EULEX will continue to defend the media's right to pursue the truth and inform the public, and it is my hope that the media choose to exercise this right with dignity, vigour, integrity, professionalism, and with an eye on truth rather than just a good story.

Third, I will strive to provide strong, accountable leadership to EULEX.

This responsibility lies with me. EULEX has good, competent employees – they are some of the most dedicated professionals with whom I have ever served and they have my full confidence. I will ensure that their efforts are supported and as navigator, I will run a tight ship and ensure that we are accountable to the member states and are fulfilling our commitments to Kosovo. This will include being honest about what has been achieved or not achieved, and providing member states with standardised measurements of progress.

I leave you with this final thought: when the internationals have powered down their computers and extinguished their desk lamps, when the slogans have been exhausted, this truth remains: Rule of law is a fundamental value of democratic states; it is a service provided by government to a public that demands it and is willing to invest its trust in it.

It is my deepest hope that Kosovo – its population, civil society, press, and government - will demand and invest in the rule of law that it deserves.