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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA TO
THE INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS
VIENNA

**Statement of the Delegation of Albania,
in response to the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania,
Ambassador Bernd Borchardt**

**As delivered by the Head of Mission, Ms. Ravesa Lleshi,
at the 1120th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council,
24 November 2016**

Mr. Chairperson,

The Albanian delegation warmly welcomes Ambassador Bernd Borchardt to the Permanent Council, in his first appearance as Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania. We thank him for the comprehensive report on the Presence activities during the past year.

For nearly 20 years, the Presence has been a strong supporter of Albania, assisting us to meet OSCE commitments and move forward towards democratization and the development of democratic institutions. We wish to emphasize how much we value the partnership we have built, and express once again our appreciation for the flexibility, experience and expertise that the Presence continues to offer in furthering our strategic priorities.

Mr. Chairperson,

We took note of the Presence's messages addressed to the Albanian political leadership regarding the charged atmosphere, even where the most strategic reforms are concerned. We can assure you of Albania's unwavering commitment to the reform agenda. We saw this commitment translated to action in July, with the unanimous adoption of the Constitutional amendments that paved the way for a radical overhaul of the justice system.

What keeps the energy for reform high, in spite of many challenges, is the political will of the Government to move ahead with the reforms, the wide societal support for this ambitious reform agenda, and the outstanding support of our partners, the OSCE Presence in Albania included.

A judiciary that is independent, professional, effective, and accountable to those it seeks to serve, is vital to a democratic society. And a reform that aims to uproot corruption in the judiciary has a transformative power with far wider reach than the justice system alone. It affects the fight against corruption, by pushing for better implementation of anti-corruption legislation and stronger and more independent anti-corruption institutions. It affects the fight against serious and organized crime, whether drug-related crimes, economic crime, trafficking of human beings or terrorism-related offenses. It affects property rights and

property reform, the protection of the environment and of vulnerable groups, to name a few of the areas where the Presence has continued to offer its assistance during the reporting period, in line with its mandate and Albania's national priorities.

All of the above makes advancing the judicial reform a key priority for the Albanian Government. An additional incentive came on 9 November 2016, when the European Commission recommended that EU Member States consider opening accession negotiations with Albania – a significant step ahead in our EU integration path, but explicitly conditioned by credible and tangible progress in the implementation of the judicial reform, in particular the re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors (“vetting”). The Albanian authorities are very conscious of the challenges that lie ahead, which makes the support of our trusted partners, like the OSCE and the Presence in Albania, even more valuable.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Presence's report notes that the justice reform may have overshadowed other important reforms. We would like to highlight two areas where Albanian authorities are devoting particular attention, independent of how the judicial reform proceeds.

The first concerns the fight against cannabis, where the Albanian Government has already started work on drafting a strategic document that aims to strengthen the fight against cultivation and trafficking. We view cooperation with international partners in this endeavor as of utmost importance and have already reached out for support. We are glad to see the OSCE Presence in Albania among those that have responded positively to the request.

The second area regards Countering Violent Extremism, where the Government has stepped up efforts to implement the National CVE Strategy, through a comprehensive approach that brings together municipal leaders, civil society and the private sector, and strengthens their capacity for CVE engagement. In this endeavor as well, we consider the OSCE Presence as a supportive partner of Albania and welcome further cooperation.

Mr. Chairperson,

Albania appreciates the cross-dimensional approach of the OSCE Presence in its mandated activities, as a way to bring coherence across all three dimensions and ensure greater efficiency.

We also value the regional outlook of the Presence in its activities, not only for the importance that Albania attaches to stronger regional cooperation, but also in view of the common challenges we face. We find it important to continue engaging youth, women and the marginalized, and giving a regional dimension to this engagement, where possible. RYCO, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans, will be operational in February 2017, and we look forward to working with the Presence in that framework as well.

As Albania prepares for the parliamentary elections in 2017, we would like to assure you again of the Government's commitment to address the recommendations made by OSCE/ODIHR and the willingness to closely cooperate with ODIHR and the Presence in that respect. Increasing the political

participation of women and strengthening of the public service media are important priorities of the Albanian Government, particularly so in an election year, and we would welcome the continued support of the Presence.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to hear participating States recognize the significant progress that Albania has made in all mandated areas of Presence activity, and would like to once again express our appreciation for the assistance and expertise that the OSCE Presence in Albania provides to our institutions and civil society.

Close coordination between Albania, the Presence and other partners has proven critical to eliminating overlap, increasing complementarity and delivering distinct, mutually-reinforcing impact. We also encourage the Presence to continue the review of its programs in order to assess their efficiency, both in terms of cost-effectiveness and capacity building efforts in the country.

By way of conclusion, I would like to wish Ambassador Borchardt and his excellent team in Tirana every success in their future endeavors, as well as thank all previous speakers for their comments.

I thank you Mr. Chairperson.