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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 Mission to Serbia,
Ambassador Andrea Orizio**

**As delivered by the Head of Mission, Ms. Ravesa Lleshi, at the
1134th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, 16 February 2017**

Mr. Chairperson,

The Albanian delegation joins others in welcoming Ambassador Andrea Orizio, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia in his first appearance in the Permanent Council and we thank him and his team for the report presented today. Albania aligned with the statement of the European Union, but I would like to make a few remarks in a national capacity.

We appreciate the Mission's engagement and its work during 2016 in providing expertise and assistance to the host country in its four mandated areas – police affairs, rule of law, democratization and the media – convinced that progress made towards EU integration, Serbia's strategic priority, is important not only for Serbia, but the entire region.

Good neighborly relations are vital for peace and stability in the Western Balkans and Albania remains committed to engaging with Serbia. Last October, Prime Minister Rama paid his third visit to Serbia. Our countries have succeeded in establishing an open and frank dialogue, preparing the ground for improved bilateral relations and stronger regional cooperation.

We once again express our appreciation to the Mission for its support, in close co-operation with the Presence in Albania, to implement the Memorandum of Understanding on Youth Co-operation signed between Albania and Serbia in late 2014. Enhancing understanding and friendship among young people in the region through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities is a priority of our organization and the field operations in the region, and we encourage the Mission to engage with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, which has its seat in Tirana.

Albania strongly supports the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, viewing progress in the normalization of relations between the two countries as critical for them and the Western Balkans as a whole. We would welcome the Mission's support in the implementation of the agreements reached in Brussels, within its existing mandate. Recognition of diplomas from Kosovo is one such area, where implementation would have a significant impact on the socio-economic situation of the Albanian population in south Serbia.

We encourage the Mission to continue to maintain its focus on integrating national minorities into the political, economic and social life of the country and appreciate the Mission's efforts towards improving the teaching and learning of the Serbian language in elementary schools in the three ethnic-Albanian majority municipalities in south Serbia, as well as providing an educational course on the Serbian language aimed at the Albanian speaking students enrolled in the Bujanovac Department of the Subotica Faculty of Economics of Novi Sad University. We would be interested to hear from Ambassador Orizio what the Mission could do to address the lack of school textbooks in the Albanian language in south Serbia. Approximately 50 percent of primary school textbooks are lacking, while there are no approved textbooks in Albanian at the secondary school level.

We also note that the local elections of 24 April 2016 produced significant change in the municipalities of Bujanovac and Presevo, bringing forward a new leadership with fresh mentalities, committed to restoring hope through sustainable policies, entrepreneurship, economic projects and social cohesion. And most importantly, for the first time in many years, there is a new approach of the political forces and local authorities in Bujanovac and Presevo towards cooperation with the central government. It is an opportunity not to be missed, but to be used wisely through greater attention towards meeting the legitimate demands put forward by the local political forces. We would appreciate Ambassador Orizio's assessment of the Mission's role in the ongoing dialogue on the seven point Common Agenda, agreed upon by both sides on 25 February 2013.

Mr. Chairperson,

We commend the adoption by the Serbian Government of the National Strategy for the Prosecution of War Crimes. It is our strong belief that overcoming legacies of the past and fostering reconciliation is crucial for the peace, stability and prosperity of the region. We will reiterate the encouragement expressed by the EU for the Mission to Serbia to consider its role in supporting the reconciliation process between Kosovo and Serbia, within its existing mandate.

We wish Ambassador Orizio and his able team every success in their very important work.

I thank you.