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PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF

TO THE INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS
VIENNA

**Statement delivered by Ambassador Zef Mazi,
Permanent Representative of Albania,
on behalf of the delegations of the SAP countries – Albania,
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and
Montenegro, in response to the address at the Permanent Council
of the OSCE by the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria
and President of the European Council, H.E. Mrs. Ursula Plassnik**

Special Permanent Council Meeting No.591, 2 February 2006

Mr. Chairman,

The delegations of the SAP countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Albania, on whose behalf I am speaking, are honored to warmly welcome in the Permanent Council today the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, H.E. Mrs Ursula Plassnik, in her capacity as President of the Council of the European Union and as host country of the OSCE. Let me thank you, Madam Minister, for coming here and for your important and comprehensive address to the OSCE's Permanent Council today. This speaks of the importance and attention that the European Union attaches to the OSCE, to its work, role and contribution in the Euro-Atlantic democratic space.

Madam Minister, our countries share the view of the European Union in its aims to promote peace, democracy and stability by combating the causes underlying insecurity in the world. All instruments at the disposal of the international community should be used in a coherent and integrated manner to that end. We are glad to note that the EU, as indicated in your priorities, Madam Minister, will continue intensive cooperation with other multilateral organizations, such as the OSCE, particularly in areas of common interest, such as human rights and the rule of law. The OSCE has indeed a lot of expertise to offer. It can be considered one of the leading organizations in these fields. We do agree with your assessment that an effective multilateralism is considered key to inspiring common action in that regard. Our countries look forward to a closer and more effective cooperation with the EU also in the OSCE context.

The taking over of the Presidency of the European Union by Austria gives us, your next door neighbours, the special pleasure of conveying to you our best wishes for accomplishing the priorities of this Presidency. We are confident that objectives such as to increase public confidence in the European

project, to advance of the implementation of the Lisbon Agenda and to strengthen the EU's role in the world, will be successfully pursued during your term in office.

We welcome the inclusion of the Western Balkans among the priorities of the Austrian Presidency. We highly appreciate your commitment to making the European perspective of the Western Balkans more tangible and taking our countries closer to the goal of EU membership. The inclusion in the Presidency's Agenda of an EU-Western Balkans Foreign Ministers meeting, as well as other ministerial and high-level joint meetings in different sectors, will have a positive influence in this regard.

Based on the conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council, a new cycle of enlargement encompassing the Balkans has practically been established. This is the best signal and encouragement for our countries which, while on the same path, each on its own merits, are moving forward and closer to the EU. The accession negotiations with Croatia and the candidate status to Macedonia can only be a best illustration to this.

The inclusion of our countries in the priorities of the Austrian Presidency confirms the EU's commitment to the full European integration of the Balkans. This is particularly important in light of the pending resolution of certain open issues in the Balkans. Equally important, however, is that it also expresses your confidence that we can deliver tangible results and advance on the road to the EU. We assure you, Madam Minister, that our countries intend to seize this momentum and justify the vested confidence by continuing the process of reforms, strengthening our regional cooperation, implementing in full the recommendations of our individual European Partnerships and meeting all necessary conditions and criteria to achieve the goal of EU membership.

Our countries do hope that the financial support to be envisaged for our region in the Financial Perspective 2007-2013 would adequately reflect the EU's political commitment to this end.

Mr Chairman, noting the importance the EU attaches to the OSCE and its important role in promoting and strengthening democracy and democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law in OSCE area, we would like to reiterate our countries' commitment to full cooperation with the OSCE participating states, with the EU and the European Commission, in achieving our common goals in a united Europe free and whole.

Allow me to say only a few words in my national capacity. Albania wishes to express its confidence that during the Austrian Presidency an historic contribution would be made to my country's European integration. After a long period of negotiations with the European Commission on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, we are glad that the SAA is now almost completed, ready to be paraphed and concluded in the very near future. Albania has the willingness and the capacity to work hard and guarantee the successful implementation of the Agreement. We are confident and look forward to the signing of the SAA during the Austrian Presidency.

EU President Barroso's scheduled visit to Tirana in the second half of February would definitely contribute to it. This historic moment would indeed give a boost and an encouragement to the whole country and to the further increase Albania's constructive role in the Western Balkan region.

Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman, our countries wish Austria all possible success in their tenure of the Presidency of the European Union.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.