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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 Address by EU Commissioner  
for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations,  
H.E. Mr. Johannes Hahn**

**As delivered by the Head of Mission, Ms. Ravesa Lleshi, at the  
1169<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, 18 December 2017**

Mr. Chairperson,

The Albanian Delegation warmly welcomes to the Permanent Council the EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, H.E. Mr. Johannes Hahn.

Commissioner, at this point we usually voice our alignment with the statement of the European Union. So as not to break our record, let me thank you for your address today and express Albania's alignment with the positions expressed. I find it important to emphasize that our 100% alignment rate is not the product of an automatic process. It is a choice that expresses Albania's commitment to EU accession. It is a mark of our appreciation for the work of the EU Delegation and the delegations of EU Member States to make the OSCE stronger. It also reflects the common goals that the OSCE and the EU have in a number of areas, as highlighted in your remarks Commissioner.

Democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, prosperity through economic freedom and social justice, equal security for all the participating States – that is what we should strive for here at the OSCE. Many of the reforms that we have undertaken in Albania enjoy the strong encouragement and steady support of both the OSCE and the EU for the simple reason that both organizations are anchored in common values. The judicial reform that we are implementing in Albania is one example where EU support continues to be instrumental not only for transforming the justice system, but also for strengthening democratic institutions, good governance and the rule of law, for fighting corruption and organized crime, for supporting vulnerable groups. We can also add good neighborly relations and

inclusive regional cooperation, and it still would be difficult to draw a line between what is expected of candidates and aspirants before joining the EU, and what we have committed ourselves to when joining the OSCE. For Albania, the OSCE and the EU do not present competing agendas; they are complementary.

In early November, Commissioner, you visited Tirana for the launch of the EU-Western Balkans Media Days, highlighting the importance of freedom of expression and of free media as pillars of open and prosperous societies, an event complementary to the one organized by the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE RFoM in February, here in Vienna, which focused on safety of journalists and media ethics in the Western Balkans.

In Albania, we work closely with ODIHR on election standards, where the joint EU-ODIHR project to support democratic elections in the Western Balkans will be key in the follow-up to ODIHR electoral recommendations. ODIHR and the OSCE Presence in Albania have already started implementation and we look forward to a fruitful cooperation.

And staying in the Western Balkans, allow me to express Albania's appreciation for your statements, Commissioner, during your recent visit in Greece, where you noted that the year 2018 will be crucial to promote the accession of the Western Balkans to the European Union.

We share the position that a credible enlargement policy and closer cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans are strategic investments and safeguards for Europe's security, prosperity and peace. For the Western Balkans, the EU integration process is at its core a process of stability and reconciliation. The EU is the most effective player to bring all the countries of the region together, and even though the criteria remain strict, the mechanisms have proven flexible when flexibility was needed.

Finally, Commissioner, allow me to assure you once again of the value we place on the support that the EU extends to Albania, the Western Balkans and to the OSCE field operations in our region. And we hope to receive some good news in 2018.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.