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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Report of the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Florian Raunig

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 31, 2013

The United States welcomes Ambassador Raunig to the Permanent Council for his first report as Head of Presence, and we thank him for his comprehensive report. Mr. Ambassador, we appreciate the experience you bring to this position and the tremendous work that you and your dedicated staff do every day.

This past year in Albania has been marked by significant events, notably the 100-year anniversary of Albania's independence and the well-conducted Parliamentary elections in June. We were pleased that ODIHR concluded that the elections were "competitive, with active citizen participation throughout the campaign and genuine respect for fundamental freedoms." We note, however, that the atmosphere of distrust between the two main political parties tainted the electoral environment and challenged the administration of the electoral process. More directly related to your work, we are pleased that you have made it a priority to cultivate strong working relationships not just with the new government, but also with other political actors, broader societal groups in Albania, and other international actors. As you have mentioned, in a time of declining OSCE budgets, it is critical that the OSCE's field operations communicate and collaborate closely with other key international partners.

The European Commission's decision to recommend granting EU candidate status to Albania, on the understanding that the country continues to make progress in the fight against organized crime and corruption, is likely to play an important role in advancing the reform process in Albania. We support your plans to focus attention on assisting Albania in those areas where the OSCE has a niche capacity and which support EU accession process priorities. As progress advances in areas such as anti-corruption, police training, and the fight against human trafficking, we encourage you to continue cooperation with international actors and local groups who can assist in these efforts. We also look to you and your team to assess the particular areas where the host country officials have made sufficient progress so as to indicate that little outside assistance is needed to maintain and continue a positive trajectory.

As you have noted, we are pleased with Albania's high level of participation recently in OSCE activities, including hosting the High-level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in May and the South-East Europe Media Conference in September, and, more recently, its ministerial-level participation earlier this week at the Mediterranean Partners conference. We encourage Albania to continue to give an equivalent level of attention to the daily work of the reform process itself. You have pointed out the high expectations of the Albanian people, and meeting those expectations will take hard work by

Albanian officials, a true commitment to continued substantive reform, and a long-term vision that is focused on completing the integration process.

We again thank you for your report, for the work that you and your staff do, and we look forward to your time in Albania as Head of Presence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.