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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Borchardt

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 21, 2019

Thank you, Ambassador Borchardt, for your presentation today and your informal presentation yesterday. For more than twenty years, the OSCE Presence in Albania has been intrinsic to Albania's progress in combating corruption and organized crime, reforming the judiciary, and supporting human rights and fundamental freedoms. We value your timely, detailed report.

We commend the Presence's work supporting Albania's democratic reform efforts, particularly amidst a domestic backdrop of political polarization. Consistent with OSCE principles and commitments, we believe it is important to support individuals' political engagement and their right to peaceful assembly.

The United States believes the Presence has a unique opportunity to bring together politicians and opinion leaders in Albania to achieve meaningful electoral reform. We were pleased the ad hoc parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform has drawn upon ODIHR recommendations as it seeks to improve the electoral system. Albania set an example for other participating States by incorporating the advice of the OSCE into domestic policy, and we expect that Albania will continue to set an example as it assumes the OSCE Chairmanship for 2020.

Judicial reform is crucial for Albania's democratic progress and creates a solid foundation from which Albania can foster good governance, counter violent extremism, and combat corruption, organized crime, and drug trafficking. The United States was pleased to hear of progress in the appointment of judges to the Albanian Constitutional Court, a positive step in the reinstatement of the Constitutional Court. Work remains, however, to reach the necessary quorum to hear cases. We appreciate the Presence's work to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the High Judicial Council and High Prosecutorial Council through technical support and fostering regional cooperation. We call on the Presence to help Albania implement additional reforms.

Ambassador, we agree with your statement that the fight against corruption remains one of the main challenges for Albania. We appreciate the Presence's collaboration with Albanian institutions, local authorities, and international actors to provide training and technical assistance to support Albania's anti-corruption efforts. The United States is

doing its part, including by contributing to your office's extra-budgetary project to establish a master's program in criminology at the University of Tirana.

The upcoming Albanian Chairmanship offers an opportunity to highlight the Presence's work, especially on priorities like electoral and judicial reform. Albania has been a steadfast ally when it comes to addressing security concerns that face Europe. By taking on the Chair-in-Office role, Albania has seized the opportunity to validate its leadership potential in the region, as well as to demonstrate its capacity to stand strong against malign influences.

The opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania is key for the region's Euro-Atlantic integration. We appreciate that the OSCE Presence has advocated for policies and practices that uphold the democratic principles that bind the Transatlantic community. The United States stands ready to coordinate closely with the Presence and the upcoming Albanian Chairmanship in pursuing our shared goals to further Albania's democratic progress.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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