



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 2, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the floor, and thank you, Ambassador Del Monaco, for your thorough presentation today, it’s a real pleasure to see you here again.

We recognize that this year, like last year, the work of the OSCE in Albania was carried out in the midst of a global pandemic. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, your office continued to act as a strong and supportive partner to Albania and successfully implemented an impressive variety of activities in line with your mandate. In support of Albania’s ongoing justice and electoral reforms, your office provided substantive and creative training, programs, and events. *“Fake News, Youth, and Elections”* was a particularly engaging event that encouraged youth to play an active role in democracy and recognize the presence of disinformation, which is a challenge for democracies around the world today. We also want to highlight Parliament’s efforts to increase public access to the legislative process through new technologies such as e-Legislation, online consultation platforms, and various webinars. These are innovative approaches that not

only inform the public of parliamentary activities, but also encourage participation in the democratic process. As more and more government activities transfer to the digital domain, we support the joint efforts of your office and the Albanian State Police to address cyber threats by increasing Albania's logistical capacity. We note with concern, however, recently approved parliamentary restrictions that provide unequal access amongst accredited journalists and may negatively affect Parliament's transparency by hindering journalists' ability to report.

Additionally, Ambassador Del Monaco, your office helped foster Albania's efforts to combat organized crime through cooperative legal assistance, the creation of new legal frameworks, and the implementation of managerial training courses. This dovetails very nicely with our shared goal of implementing new initiatives on combating transnational organized crime at the OSCE and was, in fact, the primary topic of discussion at one of the panels in yesterday's *Annual Security Review Conference*. We also want to especially highlight your cross-dimensional approach to this issue by conducting pilot studies to determine the impact of corruption on women and girls. We also see a need for more research on the gendered dimension of corruption. And, so, Ambassador Del Monaco, how can the OSCE help your office address this issue? These efforts, as well as efforts to increase the representation of women in ministerial positions and Albania's efforts to work with civil society organizations to anchor gender equality in

electoral reform, help advance the full and effective participation of women in peace and security.

Like you, Ambassador, the United States recognizes that more work remains to be done. Looking ahead, we welcome efforts to successfully identify victims and prosecute perpetrators of human trafficking. We also look forward to seeing the OSCE further support Albania as it builds capacity to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, fight corruption and organized crime, counter cyber threats, and uphold human rights.

Finally, we would like to recognize and thank Albania for its strong international leadership in recent years. Having completed a successful Chairpersonship in 2020 under the leadership of Prime Minister Rama and our dear colleague Ambassador Hasani, Albania is now serving as Chair of the *OSCE Asian Partners for Cooperation*. These contributions demonstrate Albania's ability to provide strong international leadership while holding firm to matters of principle.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.