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**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON
OF THE**

**CONTACT GROUP WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN
PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION**

**TO THE
TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONTACT GROUP WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION TO THE TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Albania is committed to strengthening and further developing the Partnership of the OSCE with its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. During the Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group in 2019, Albania fostered an inclusive political dialogue, following a demand-driven approach and responding to the interests and priorities of the Mediterranean Partners. The celebration in 2019 of the 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Contact Group allowed for a year-long brainstorming about the future of the Partnership and the available Partnership tools. In coordination with the 2019 Slovak OSCE Chairmanship and in line with the efforts of previous Chairmanships of the Mediterranean Contact Group, Albania strived to take the Partnership to the next level, by building on the progress made in recent years.

Six meetings of the Mediterranean Contact Group were held in Vienna during the course of the year, providing a valuable platform for information exchange, dialogue and sharing of best practices between the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. The subjects of the six meetings were jointly selected with the Mediterranean Partners in order to reflect the wide range of topics of interest to the individual Mediterranean Partner countries and to support the priorities of the 2019 Slovak OSCE Chairmanship.

Apart from the Contact Group meetings, a special Ambassadorial Retreat took place in La Valetta, Malta on June 7-8, with the aim to take stock of the Partnership on its 25th anniversary. The retreat was followed by the OSCE Mediterranean Conference that was held in Tirana, Albania on October 24-25. The annual conference entitled “The 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Contact Group: achievements, challenges and future opportunities for the Partnership” also commemorated the anniversary of the Partnership and focused on the next twenty five years, fostering a conversation among participating States and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation on what has been achieved and what can be improved in the OSCE approach to Mediterranean co-operation.

At the first meeting of the Mediterranean Contact Group held on 19 March, Artemis Malo Deputy Foreign Minister of Albania announced the Chairmanship’s balanced package of priorities, with elements from all the three dimensions and stressed the importance of continuity with previous Chairmanships. She also mentioned the 25th Anniversary of the Mediterranean Contact Group as a unique opportunity to take stock of the partnership. Secretary General Greminger attended the first meeting and noted that the engagement of the Mediterranean Partners had increased in recent years stressing the importance of keeping the momentum. He further echoed the importance of continuity. He reiterated the need for a more strategic approach to the Partnership. On behalf of the Slovak Chairmanship Ambassador Boháč also noted the need to ensure long-term continuity and conveyed Slovakia’s specific commitment to the subject of youth. All Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, as well as participating States voiced their strong support for the priorities identified by Albania at the helm of the MCG and called for keeping up its growing political profile. The first meeting was dedicated to the “Role of Youth in Fostering Dialogue, Co-operation and Security in the Mediterranean Region”. Laurence Païs, Deputy Secretary General for the Union for the Mediterranean noted that 60% of the population of the Mediterranean Region was under 30 years old, which was a matter of concern, but also a source of opportunities and advantages.

She concluded by expressing readiness to co-operate with the OSCE and other regional organizations. Hamid Boukrif, General Director for Prospective, Studies and Training at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, focused his presentation on the characteristics of today's youth who, in his view, were well educated and very connected. He also underscored the need to address the root sources of youth migration. Sarah Toumi from Tunisia, Founder of Acacias for All, who has set up a private enterprise dedicated to fighting desertification, poverty and gender inequality focused on ways to create job opportunities for young people. Elad Shoshan, Executive Director of Zikaron BaSalon, from Israel, talked about his initiative, "Memories in the living room", a project to create a forum to maintain the memory of the Holocaust among youth. Dina ElHarouni, a sportswoman and researcher in Bioinformatics Field spoke about "Presidential Leadership Programme" targeting the youth. In the follow up discussion, many delegations emphasized the issue of unemployment, education and political participation and the role of youth in combatting xenophobia and radicalization.

The second meeting took place on 13 of May and focused on addressing challenges related to the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families. In his opening remarks Ambassador of Albania and Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group, Igli Hasani stated that further efforts were needed in dealing with foreign terrorist fighters in prison and post-prison environments, and in providing assistance to accompanying family members. He also stressed the need for effective programs to rehabilitate them and reintegrate them back into society. Rasa Ostrauskaite, Co-ordinator of TNT Activities of the OSCE, presented OSCE efforts and explained the two phases of the problem "before and after" they cross the borders. Tamara Rakkad, Director of the Legal Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan noted that the issue of the foreign terrorist fighters was not a new topic and shared her country's experience as the largest host of refugees in the world. Jordan has developed an advanced border control system and a special Peace Center under the Ministry of the Interior that provides psychological, social and health aid to families of foreign terrorist fighters, tries to reintegrate them into productive society and promote non-radical Islam. Agron Sojati, National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism and Director of the Coordinator CVE Centre of Albania, which was created in 2018 and involves 7 ministries made special emphasis on women and children, and explained how the Government of Albania works closely with teachers, social workers and local governments. Thomas Wuchte, Executive Secretary of the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law of Malta, described their initiatives, which include a guidebook and trainings for parliamentarians and law practitioners. While underscoring their commitment towards combatting the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, as well as intervening participating States recognized the need of addressing the issue jointly.

Between 7 and 8 June Malta hosted the Ambassadorial Retreat in co-operation with the Albanian Chairmanship. The objective of the retreat that took place in La Valetta was to take stock of the Mediterranean Partnership on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. The Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group, Albanian Ambassador Igli Hasani opened the retreat by stressing the importance of the partnership as Europe and the Mediterranean were going through turbulent times with non-state actors posing increasing threats to security. For the host country, Maltese Minister Carmelo Abela continued by indicating that current engagement should be action oriented on topics such as migration, human trafficking and smuggling. As one of the keynote speakers, the Egyptian Ambassador furthermore highlighted interdependence on issues such as terrorism. In a different working session, the Ambassador of Israel noted numerous opportunities for growing relations. Representing the Secretariat, Ambassador Bekkers, Director of OSCE Secretary General recalled how the

partnership changed since its inception by pointing out current opportunities to broaden areas of cooperation. Representatives further agreed on the importance of the partnership and the need to adapt it to new threats and challenges. They discussed deeper engagement, greater exchanges, improved participation, lifting the so-called out of area restrictions, developing multi-annual strategies, increasing activities and enhancing the budget of the Partnership Fund. The issue of name change from Contact Group to Partnership Group to stress the commitment and importance of the partnership was also addressed.

The third meeting of the Contact Group was held on 18 June and was dedicated to “Strengthening economic connectivity in the Mediterranean”. Ambassador of Albania Igli Hasani opened the meeting by highlighting the direct link between enabling regular, predictable, and transparent commercial contacts on the one hand, and peace and security on the other. Etjen Xhafaj, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania explained that the lack of economic opportunities and future prospects are powerful drivers of insecurity and destabilization, and that procedural impediments at border crossings hinder international trade and foreign investments, create high costs for trade transactions and delays in the cross-border movement of goods. He welcomed the efforts of the OSCE towards the dissemination and implementation of best practices and standards. Maoukil Moulay Mhammed, Director of Trade Remedies and Legal Affairs of the Agadir Agreement Technical Unit, introduced the Arab-Mediterranean Free Trade Agreement that was developed within the framework of the Barcelona Declaration and supported by the European Union. The interventions by the speakers sparked a lively and productive discussion among delegations. While underscoring the fact that regional and sub-regional integration processes and agreements can give an important impulse to trade and economic development in the wider OSCE area, Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, as well as participating States recognized the need to enhance collaboration and engagement and to continue the exchange of best practices. The meeting included a presentation of the joint Union for the Mediterranean-OSCE project concept on “Climate and Environment Security Threats in the Mediterranean”. Vuk Zugic, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities explained the goal of this initiative, which was to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices with the Mediterranean Partners. Senior Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, Jorge Borrego, expressed the availability and wish of his organization to collaborate on concrete projects with the OSCE and contribute to enhancing regional cooperation and dialogue.

The fourth meeting on July 23 was dedicated to “Enhancing Common Security in the OSCE and Mediterranean Region: the Role of Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue”. At this meeting Roland Bimo, Ambassador of Albania to Austria and a former Albanian representative at the UN, highlighted Albania’s commitment to religious diversity, freedom, and tolerance. He illustrated a range of concrete initiatives that Albania has promoted domestically to dispel misconceptions about religious beliefs and to promote interreligious exchange and dialogue. He focused on pilot projects in the field of education. He further emphasized that Albania was committed to fighting violent radicalization based on religious grounds and stressed that the misuse and misinterpretation of religion were to be blamed. Ambassador Mohamed Kazem, Deputy Assistant Minister for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, focused on the challenges posed by misunderstanding and miscommunication of religious principles and beliefs. He also underlined the crucial role of education. He called for a more responsible use of media and stressed that nobody inciting or committing violence should ever be tolerated on the basis of religious freedom. Father Nabil Haddad, Founder and Director of the Jordanian Inter-Faith

Co-Existence Research Center in Jordan highlighted the “Jordan model” of religious co-existence. He called for raising the profile of interreligious dialogue as well as taking it to the peoples, including by focusing on projects at the community level. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, First Deputy Director of ODIHR, highlighted the relevant commitments and mandates of the OSCE in the field of freedom of religion and beliefs. Several delegations requested to take the floor after the initial round of presentations. They stressed the continuing importance of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peace and warned against associating any religion with terrorism. There was a wide agreement among delegations that religion was part of the solution to many of the challenges facing our societies, including when it comes to combatting terrorism and preventing international conflict.

At the fifth meeting of the Contact Group on 7 October speakers addressed the topic of “Digitalization and the Future of Energy”. The meeting began with Gjergji Simaku, General Director of Energy and Industry Development Policies, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of the Republic of Albania and Ambassador Omar Amer Youseff, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the International Organizations in Vienna. They both highlighted the role of energy innovation and development in ensuring energy security. They also shared concrete examples drawn from their respective national energy policies to show that energy can be a catalyst for cooperation. Mr Mohamed Mekerba, the IT Development Manager of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) focused on the pioneering role of OPEC in the energy industry and emphasized the importance of digitalization in energy production. He expanded on the issue of efficient technology transfer and collaboration among countries in the region. He mentioned not only positive, but also negative aspects of the digitalization in the industry. Ettore Greco, Executive Vice President of the Institute of International Relations (IAI) in Rome stressed the need to promote political dialogue and regional co-operation in the energy sector. He also emphasized the importance of protecting the energy infrastructure. He predicted that in the nearest future the South Mediterranean region would become a hub of energy flows. He also prognosticated a dramatic increase in energy consumption in the region due to demographic growth and urbanization. With that, he warned, might come the risk of growing mismatch in supply and demand of energy. Much like the previous speaker, he pointed out both advantages and disadvantages of digitalization in the energy sector. The intervening delegations spoke of the opportunities their countries were trying to seize in the fast evolving field of energy digitalization, discussed the possibility of transitioning to sustainable energy sources and shared their best practice regarding alternative energy resources.

The 2019 OSCE Mediterranean Conference organized by the Albanian Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group was held in Tirana, Albania, on 24 and 25 October. The conference entitled “The 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Contact Group: achievements, challenges and future opportunities for the Partnership” was attended by a plurality of foreign ministers and deputy foreign ministers and more than 250 high level representatives of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions, international organizations, civil society, academia and media. The Conference was opened by Acting Foreign Minister Cakaj, Slovak State Secretary Lukáš Parížek, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Italy Marina Sereni and Secretary General of the Union for Mediterranean Nasser Kamel. The conference looked into ways to deepen the Mediterranean co-operation and further common security in the Mediterranean. It consisted of a high-level political session focusing on what has been achieved and what was still missing in the relationship between the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. During the opening political segment, Acting Foreign Minister of

Albania Cakaj stressed that co-operation with the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation was essential to better ensure a safe environment for our countries' citizens and generating prosperity across the entire region. The political segment was followed by three working sessions covering all three dimensions dedicated to: countering terrorism; youth participation and engagement; and economic connectivity. The first session addressed joint efforts in countering terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism – good practices, challenges and the way forward. The second session focused on promoting youth participation and engagement to enhance dialogue and co-operation in the Mediterranean. The third session was dedicated to building bridges between the two shores of the Mediterranean – the role of connectivity, digitalization, sustainable development and economic growth in advancing common security in the Mediterranean. During the concluding remarks Acting Foreign Minister Cakaj made assurances that Albania would promote closer political consultations with the Mediterranean Partners in 2020 and OSCE Secretary General Greminger stressed that Mediterranean Partners had a key role to play in determining the future pace and path of the co-operation.

The last and sixth meeting of the Contact Group on July 23 was dedicated to cyber security and focused on cyber/ICT security incidents that could negatively impact relations between States. In the introductory remarks, Albania as the Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group made reassurances that Mediterranean cooperation would remain a priority also during the Albanian 2020 Chairmanship. The importance of continuity in discussing cyber security, which is a topic of common concern, and the possibility of involving Mediterranean Partners in the OSCE Point of Contact network based on CBM8 were also mentioned. The first to take the floor was newly appointed Ambassador Rodgold, Permanent Representative of Israel who presented Israeli cyber security policy and strategy. He introduced three operational layers of the Israeli policy including aggregate cyber robustness, systemic cyber resilience and active efforts to address the roots of the threats. Ambassador Dan, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the OSCE and “Chair of the Informal Working Group established by PC Decision 1039” spoke about the work of the IWG including the development of CBMs. He announced his intention to establish regular consultation with the Mediterranean Contact Group and personally visit the capitals of the Mediterranean Partners to introduce them to the CBMs. Szilvia Tóth, Cyber Security Officer, OSCE Transnational Threats Department presented the conclusions and lessons learned from the 2019 cyber/ICT security training held with Mediterranean partners. The main conclusion was that there was a window of opportunity for more co-operation between participating States and Mediterranean Partners. She announced that the TNTD plans to continue involvement of partners and publicized upcoming workshops to deepen cooperation and raise awareness on cyber CBMs. She further addressed extending the OSCE Point of Contact network to Mediterranean Partners stressing the need for channels of communication if/when the need arises. Jan Przewozniak Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland, provided an update on the Warsaw Process cybersecurity working group that convened in Seoul in October. He said that the meeting addressed ways how to respond to significant cyber incidents, which included nomination of cyber contact points. He also stated that the group further acknowledged the importance of interregional cooperation. In their interventions, most partners welcomed the initiative to deepen co-operation and shared their cyber security activities and strategies.

The Albanian Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group expresses its sincere gratitude to all the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and the participating States for their commitment and constructive co-operation in the framework of the OSCE Partnership. By wishing the best of success to the incoming Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group,

Albania encourages continuing and deepening the productive exchange with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in meetings in Vienna and the annual conference along the themes to which both the OSCE and the Partners have committed over the past years and which reflect all aspects of a comprehensive security approach.