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## **Statement of Edi Rama, Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, at the closing of the Ministerial as the Chair-in-Office of the OSCE 2020**

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Isn't it amazing?

Albania will formally take on 1<sup>st</sup> of January the Chairmanship of the OSCE, exactly 45 years after its foundation.

And guess what? 45 years ago, Albania, through the voice of its communist dictator Enver Hoxha, was the only European state to not only refuse to be part of the OSCE, but also to denounce its birth as follows:

“The only hope of all the satellites of the Soviets is to strengthen their friendship with the US and West, to seek investments from them in the form of credits without any restrictions, to allow the church to occupy its former place, to deepen the moral degeneration...” and so on.

I was 11 at that time - a pioneer as the kids were labelled in the old Albania. Today, I am the 55-year old Prime Minister of the new Albania, which as a proud member of the OSCE prepares to chair this organisation of 57 countries and more than 1 billion people – from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Isn't it amazing?

Dear Minister Lajcak, dear Miro,

First and foremost, thank you for your warm hospitality, and thank you for the ten commandments you handed me before entering this room.

And thank you for your remark to me that, in the end, the OSCE is about people. And not just a few, but more than 1 billion.

Dear Secretary-General,

Esteemed colleagues,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Gathering here in Bratislava, we found consensus on important decisions. That gives me confidence that despite our differences, achievements are possible if we are patient, perseverant and ready to create the necessary diplomatic space.

In particular, we applaud the decision on the future Swedish and Polish Chairmanships, improving our ability to give strategic direction to the OSCE in the coming years.

And I hope our initiative to change the name of the Contact Groups with Asian and Mediterranean Partners will be approved.

On the other hand, we regret that there are several key decisions on which we have not reached agreement. There are still deep fractures on key political and security issues, where participating States around the table here feel that no compromise is acceptable or that OSCE commitments are being violated.

It falls to the incoming Albanian Chairperson-in-Office to look ahead to the upcoming year.

For Albania, it is a historic moment. Albania is a country with a rich and diverse history, strong traditions, and an aspirational vision for the future. After enduring many challenges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our people now aspire to lasting prosperity, security, and peace – all of which is in no small part dependent upon good relations with our neighbours and with partners further away.

Religious harmony and hospitality are easily recognised among Albanians. Pope Francis chose Albania for his first official visit abroad to encourage what he called religious fraternity among Muslims, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, and others. Furthermore, Albania was the only country with a large number of Jewish people at the end of the Second World War compared to when it started and with no single Jew having been released to the Nazis.

But one does not need to go so far back in time to recognise our hospitality. In 1999, in a country of no more than 3 million people, we welcomed and housed more than 500 thousand Albanians from Kosova, in what now should serve to everyone as a reminder of what does not need to be repeated ever again.

From a nation under a cruel regime that opposed the Helsinki spirit, we are now honoured to have your confidence and lead our organization. Chairing the OSCE marks the highlight of such significant transformation.

Our vision for the Albanian Chairmanship in 2020 is guided by three important standpoints:

Firstly, we intend to focus on the basics - **implementing together, in good faith, the encompassing set of our political commitments**. This is essential for the credibility of the OSCE as the largest regional security organization, and for all of us, its participating States. The Helsinki recipe for peace in Europe is simple yet effective - respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. If we want security and peace in Europe, we all have to take responsibility for fully implementing our commitments.

Secondly, the OSCE has proven its ability to deploy quickly and, sometimes, where no one else can. This is a huge asset. **Making a difference on the ground**, be it when preventing the escalation of a conflict, monitoring elections or supporting reforms, improves the security and prosperity of our citizens. This is a unique advantage of our organization and the Albanian Chairmanship will promote the work of the OSCE where it is closest to our people.

Thirdly, inspired by the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter of Paris, we will continue to **strengthen dialogue**. This is the only way to rebuild trust between us. Promoting confidence-building measures and making full use of the Structured Dialogue are critical to this endeavour.

Our detailed programme of priorities for 2020 will be distributed at the start of the year. But I would like to take this opportunity to mention some key issues that will feature in our agenda:

**The crisis in and around Ukraine** remains the most pressing security challenge in Europe. It is unacceptable that protracted conflicts in our region continue to claim lives. Therefore, **conflict resolution efforts** will be on top of the agenda of the Albanian Chairmanship.

**Women** continue to suffer most from instability and conflict. They are also unjustly excluded from peace talks. That is why we will focus both on **combating violence against women** and on promoting the **role of women in peace and security**. We will do our part by appointing more women to positions of responsibility in the OSCE. But I also call upon you: as several positions will be vacant next year, please nominate as many qualified female candidates as possible. On this topic, we bring a positive legacy, with Albania ranking among the top five in the world for women's participation in government and ranking high worldwide for the number of women in public affairs.

**Corruption** erodes the foundations of our democracies and has an adverse impact on the prosperity and security of our region, along with other transnational threats. Building on the momentum created by previous Chairmanships, we will enhance the work of the OSCE in combating corruption and promoting good governance.

**Trafficking in human beings** is both a serious human rights violation and a security risk. The OSCE is now a global leader in combating human trafficking and in 2020, we will continue to champion the OSCE's activity in this area.

Last, **intolerance and hate speech** are spreading in Europe. We must redouble efforts to counter discrimination and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I believe we have crafted a realistic and balanced programme, informed by extensive consultation with capitals and in Vienna. Throughout next year, Albania will be an open and inclusive chair. I guarantee you that the voices of each participating State will be heard and that decisions will be taken in a transparent manner.

Still, a chair cannot successfully steer the OSCE if there is no political will to compromise.

If our mindset is that joining consensus is not possible until concessions have been extracted.

If we only bring red lines to the negotiating table.

What I ask from you is to engage constructively in the life of our organization. To bring flexibility and an open mind.

We have a shared responsibility towards the OSCE. Let us ensure its functionality and let us start by adopting a timely and balanced budget by the end of this year.

We will build upon the achievements and experience of the previous chairmanships and together with the expertise of our partners we will make the next year a success.

Our success will be the success of the 57. We all have a responsibility here.

Thank you.