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NDËRKOMBËTARE

PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
TO THE INTERNATIONAL
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**OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
(Astana, 29-30 June 2010)
SESSION I**

**Statement of the Albanian Delegation
delivered by Ambassador Gilbert Galanxhi
Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE**

*Mr. Moderator,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Allow me, from the very beginning, to commend and congratulate the organizers of this Conference - the Government of Kazakhstan, for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements and working conditions provided for us. The goal of our gathering here in Astana is self-suggestive and enough inspiring to impose a positive and cooperative spirit, which will undoubtedly contribute for successful deliberations and useful recommendations for all of us.

We are sincerely pleased and very honoured to participate and render our contribution in this important event. It is true that OSCE stands for Security and Cooperation, but in its real heart it stands for Tolerance, Understanding and Non-Discrimination. Traditionally, these topics have been part and parcel and key elements of comprehensive security and stability from Vancouver to Vladivostok. We therefore commend the Chairmanship for taking the initiative to convene such an important and substance-sensitive conference, three years after the last similar event in Bucharest. I am sure that our contributions during these two days will keep the issues of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination high in the OSCE agenda.

Mr. Chairperson,

Albania is gradually but steadily and firmly progressing towards full membership into the European Union because we believe in its norms, values and principles. We fully subscribe to the EU statement, but since Albania has a unique centuries-long positive experience to share, I would like to make a few remarks on a national capacity.

Since many centuries ago, the principles of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination have been mirrored in the harmonious cohabitation of 4 diverse religions in Albania, namely: Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Bektashi. What's even more interesting and exiting is the fact that this religious spirit of tolerance and harmony has been expanded and transferred to other aspects of social environment. Today, the principles of diversity and tolerance - be it religious, ethnic or cultural - of inter-faith dialogue and harmony constitute a foundation stone in the heritage of the Albanian people and nation. It is therefore only natural that we desire to share this dimension of the Albanian world with the other peoples and nations in the OSCE space and beyond.

The inter-religious harmony and multicultural environment existing for centuries in Albania are not a gift bestowed upon my country by mere coincidence. These distinguishing features of our society are deeply entrenched in our history, the ancient and modern one. A documented significant contribution can be traced as far back as the 15th century, in the provisions of the Customary Code of the Albanians; a code of conduct configured around the word '*Besa*' (word of honour and confidence). Just think dear friends, today we talk about CSBMs, which in Albanian language reflect in only one single word: *Besa*. The main hubs of this Customary Code were hospitality and harmony; whose essence lies in the dictum "the home of the Albanian belongs to God and to the friend/guest". This dictum clearly indicates that the concepts of hospitality and harmony, in all their multifaceted expressions, determined from the very early stages the relations between the Albanian with the Almighty and the others. The Albanian considers his/her home as belonging to God; and the relations with the others as based on confidence and trust, meaning that prejudice is excluded from his/her behaviour.

The above mentioned norms, values and principles are Albania's greatest trademarks even in modern times and in a way explain the numerous, repeated and unprecedented examples that our history offers with regard to respect, acceptance and tolerance. The most significant one refers to the World War II, when all Albanian families, without any distinction of religious background, sheltered, protected and saved from annihilation the Jewish community of Albania, whose overall number by the end of the war had increased 10 fold. It is an historical fact that Albert Einstein made possible his trip to the USA due to the Albanian citizenship and passport issued by the Albanian authorities of the time. What is even more striking in the circumstances of WWII is the fact that Albanians reserved the same treatment to their immediate former war enemies – the soldiers of the disbanded Italian army, who were seeking refuge from the German army that had set foot in Albania after Italy's unconditional surrender to the Allies.

These instances, simple as they may seem, illustrate vividly and unambiguously that tolerance and acceptance are inherent features of the Albanian culture and society. Albania, being midway between Rome and Constantinople, being cross-dimensionally involved in and affected by diverse civilizations, cultures, values and norms believes in the alliance and cohabitation of civilizations. This is why the Albanian people consider diversity as an asset to cherish and protect, rather than as a threat to diffuse. This message was bequeathed by the founding fathers of the Albanian state, who, contrary to the tendencies of the time, sought to found an Albanian State for all its citizens, without distinctions of any kind.

Distinguished participants,

The values which the Albanian society takes great pride of are fully shared by all Albanian communities living in the Western Balkans, including in the multi-ethnic Republic of Kosova, where ethnic Albanians account for 90% of its entire population. The new Constitution of Kosova legally enshrines the principles of democracy, multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism. This Constitution provides for broad and unprecedented protections for all minority communities and their cultural heritage, enabling Albanians, Serbs and other ethnic groups to pool forces towards a stable, prosperous and European Kosova. But, please, bear in mind that Rome was not built in one day. Much tolerance and understanding is needed and all messages, from whatever directions, should contribute to a better life for the people of Kosova.

Mr. Moderator,

The above is sufficient to explain why Albania attaches utmost importance and strives to increase the effectiveness of the OSCE's work in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination. At a time when the global economic crisis has not been fully overcome, the need to address the increasing threats that the raise of hatred and intolerance, especially against religious and cultural diversity, pose to our security has become even more pressing. This need was also present in the address that H.E.Mr.Jorge Sampaio, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, delivered to the Permanent Council on 17 June 2010.

The activities of the OSCE with regards to tolerance and non-discrimination can successfully build upon a consistent set of the existing commitments enshrined in all OSCE milestone documents, starting from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. In particular, in recent years the OSCE has approved a number of Ministerial and Permanent Council decisions in this area, amongst which the Ljubljana Ministerial decision assumes special significance, because it reaffirms the determination of participating states to implement existing commitments and recalls the importance of inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and partnership aimed at tolerance, mutual respect and understanding

Building upon this *OSCE acquis*, we would like to draw your attention to some suggestions tailored to increase the effectiveness of the OSCE in this domain by making full use of the potential of the High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination and by strengthening the OSCE's cooperation with other regional organizations whose mandate encompasses activities in this domain.

- ***We believe that it is possible to further optimize the proceedings of the High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination and take stock of its final results and possible recommendations.***

The high-level conference could be held at regular intervals of 2 or 3 years and should be result-oriented. The decision on venue and agenda of the High Level Conference could be taken in close consultation with the Troika and the personal representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office.

The agenda of the conference could focus on a single major theme of interest for all the participating states (ex. anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, racism-xenophobia-chauvinism, etc.). The theme of the agenda could be

selected taking into account particular concerns existing at the moment of the decision and the suggestions of the personal representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office. The conference might elaborate recommendations to be submitted to the following Ministerial Council for further considerations and possible decisions. In case these recommendations are adopted by the participating states, the ODIHR could be tasked to follow up their implementation and report to the Permanent Council.

- ***Cooperation with other international organizations or bodies that share the OSCE's same objectives in the domain of tolerance and non-discrimination is another area that deserves further attention in order to optimize synergies and join common efforts.***

In view of the 2001 Bucharest Plan of Action to Combat Terrorism, which stresses the need to broaden dialogue with partners outside the OSCE area, such as the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, thought could be given to the possibility of holding high-level consultations at political and/or executive level (to co-ordinate policies or determine areas of co-operation) as well as at working level (to address the modalities of cooperation). These meetings could be institutionalized and held every year, in order to explore areas of mutual interest and organize joint events in the field of inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue, as well as religious tolerance and non-discrimination.

We believe that the potential and scope for further cooperation between the OSCE and the Alliance of Civilization (AoC) in particular is broad and needs to be fully explored in annual high-level consultations. The OSCE and the AoC could discuss opportunities to co-organize regional events or release joint reports on cultural trends, as suggested by Mr. Sampaio in his last address to the OSCE Permanent Council. The ODIHR and the AoC could also successfully cooperate, releasing joint best practices on how to respond to hate crimes and in the field of education and teaching materials to fostering tolerance, combating racism and discrimination.

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to conclude by reiterating Albania's bid to host the next high level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Albania in the year 2012. Our offer is in keeping with the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons, which recommends that decisions on the venue of future conferences on tolerance and non-discrimination should be decided taking into account the geographical diversity of states with multi-ethnic and multi-religious populations. We believe that Albania is one of the countries that fully meets these requirements and represents a proper venue to host the next meeting.

I thank you for your kind attention.