



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1117 Vienna, 3 November 2016

EU Statement in response to the address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E. Ditmir Bushati

The European Union warmly welcomes Minister Ditmir Bushati to the Permanent Council. Mr. Minister, we thank you for your presentation outlining Albania's strong commitment to the OSCE and our joint principles and commitments after 25 years as a participating State. In the past 25 years, Albania has moved forward, and fast, immensely changing its international reputation and the life of its citizens.

2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Presence in Albania. Following the events in Albania in 1997, the support of the OSCE was essential in preparing elections, building trust in newly created institutions, and bolstering the rule of law. Over the years, the programmatic work of the Presence in Albania was adjusted to reflect developments in Albania. We commend the ongoing work of the Presence in Albania, in particular in the fields of fighting organized crime and corruption, protection of human rights as well as judicial and electoral reform.

Mr. Minister,

The OSCE has a strong presence in the Western Balkans, assisting the countries of the region in the implementation of their OSCE commitments. OSCE activities help stabilize the region, reduce tensions in politically sensitive situations, strengthen the rule of law, and consolidate democracy.

The OSCE makes a very important contribution to Albania's development. This contribution is much appreciated and we look forward to continued good cooperation with the OSCE Presence also in the future. We welcome Albania's commitment to continue working closely with the OSCE Presence.

The EU remains firmly committed to Albania's EU integration process, and is determined to accompany and support this process. It is very clear to the European Union that Albania remains firmly committed to its EU reform agenda.

We congratulate Albania on the recent unanimous adoption of the constitutional amendments which constitute provisions for a deep and comprehensive judicial reform. This unprecedented step addresses a longstanding request by the overwhelming majority of the citizens for justice that is accountable, independent and transparent. It is also a major contribution to the fight against corruption and organised crime. A swift and thorough implementation of the reform is now key. We are convinced that this reform will be transformative for other areas too. It will contribute to creating a more predictable and transparent environment for business and investors. The EU supports the establishment of an International Monitoring Operation led by the European Commission to monitor and oversee the vetting process promptly once the Constitutional Court lifts the suspension of the Vetting Law.

Important steps forward on others issues have been made in particular related to rule of law, religious intolerance and the fight against violent extremism. The EU underlines that Albania should intensify its efforts to ensure the reform of the public administration and the judiciary, the fight against organised crime and corruption, the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies including in the area of minorities, and their equal treatment, and implementation of property rights.

We note the signature of the Agreement establishing the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) during the Paris Western Balkans summit in July as well as the decision to base its headquarters in Tirana. We believe that the OSCE and RYCO can join forces to support “activities that promote reconciliation of the peoples as well as programmes on remembrance, diversity, intercultural exchange, regional mobility, citizen participation and the promotion of democratic values”.

We welcome Albania’s continued constructive engagement in regional cooperation and underline the importance of ensuring good neighbourly relations, which remain essential. We also commend the climate of religious tolerance in the country and the good cooperation between religious communities. We appreciate the full alignment of Albania on all foreign and security policy issues. The EU would also like to express

our appreciation for the excellent working relationship we have with Ambassador Lleshi and her team here in Vienna.

In conclusion, Mr Minister, we thank you once again for your presentation today in the Permanent Council. We wish you every success in your activities.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, and SERBIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.