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## **Swedish Presidency of the European Union**

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 777**

**Vienna 22 October 2009**

### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Robert Bosch**

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The European Union warmly welcomes the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania Ambassador Robert Bosch back to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The European Union is pleased to note that encouraging developments have taken place in Albania since Ambassador Bosch's last appearance at the Permanent Council one year ago. During the reporting period, the Government of Albania continued to exert efforts to ensure compliance with its OSCE commitments and to progress smoothly, on the whole, on the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU that entered into force this year. In April 2009, Albania submitted its formal application for EU membership. It has continued to foster positive relations with its regional partners, thus contributing to regional stability.

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In this regard, we commend the OSCE Presence for its valuable assistance to the host country in fulfilling its ambitious reform agenda. We believe that the mandate of the Presence provides a solid base for future work. We also encourage the efforts for a strategic refocusing of the programmes to take stock of the progress achieved in the mandated areas. The close co-ordination with other international stakeholders should also continue, in order to avoid possible duplication.

As set out in the final OSCE/ODIHR report, the parliamentary elections of 28 June 2009 met most OSCE commitments whilst not fully realising Albania's potential to adhere to the highest standards for democratic elections. The shortcomings should be addressed by the Government and all key political stakeholders with the relevant assistance of the ODIHR well ahead of the 2011 local elections. In order for this process to be successful, a wide and sustained political consensus is required as well as maturity on behalf of all political actors in Albania.

Stronger political will is of particular importance with regard to developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to ensure the independence, transparency and efficiency of the judicial system. A more systematic approach is also needed in combating corruption, organized crime, and trafficking in human beings.

We note with concern the assessment in the latest progress report by the European Commission that corruption is prevalent in many areas and continues to be a particularly serious problem. The effectiveness of law enforcement and the professionalization of the civil service still require serious attention. The European

Commission highlights that little progress has been achieved in the area of public administration so far. The legal framework is largely in place through the civil service law but its implementation remains problematic.

We also note with concern that in the area of human rights existing legislation is often not enforced, especially in the field of prevention of torture and ill treatment, gender equality, child protection and combating discrimination. Additional efforts are needed to ensure full protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities and provide for the collection of accurate statistical information in this area. We encourage the Presence to continue to support the Albanian authorities in addressing the very difficult living conditions, poverty and discrimination that the Roma continue to face, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, health care, employment and adequate housing.

With regard to the media, we stress the importance to improve the overall climate, complete the legal framework, finalise the digitalisation strategy and ensure transparency of media ownership. We regret that some pressure has been applied in the period covered by this report to the media by the executive, mostly financially, but also through selective action against media operators.

We positively note the improved relations with civil society and efforts to enhance NGO participation in policy making.

In all these areas, we encourage the Albanian authorities to take full advantage of the assistance offered by the OSCE Presence and relevant OSCE institutions.

The EU also encourages all political parties in Albania to pursue a constructive political dialogue. In particular, maintaining a permanent dialogue in Parliament is a key element of democracy. To progress on the ambitious path towards EU membership, all political forces need to work together and rise above narrow party politics.

In conclusion we would like to assure Ambassador Bosch and his staff of our continued support and wish them success in their important work.

The candidate countries CROATIA\* and the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and ARMENIA align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.