



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Address by H.E. Ditmir Bushati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 3, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you Foreign Minister Bushati.

Mr. Minister, we are pleased to welcome you to the Permanent Council. On behalf of the United States, we would like to congratulate Albania on its 25th anniversary as a participating State in the OSCE. Earlier this year, the United States celebrated with Albania the 25th anniversary of the reestablishment of our diplomatic relations. As Secretary of State John Kerry recently said, the United States and Albania are friends, partners, and NATO allies, and we have enormous mutual interests and a special relationship. Albania is on the path toward full Euro-Atlantic integration, making necessary reforms to strengthen its democratic institutions.

Albania and the OSCE enjoy a close partnership. The OSCE Presence in Albania is a strong, impartial, and supportive partner, which works closely with the Albanian government, parliament, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure Albania makes sustainable progress towards meeting its OSCE commitments. The OSCE Presence also plays an important role in supporting Albania in implementation of key democratic reforms.

Albania has made significant progress in its fight for a more accountable government, its efforts to combat corruption and organized crime, and the bold steps taken this year to enact judicial reform. Fighting corruption and removing criminal influences from politics are essential for Albania's development of good governance and strong democratic institutions. On July 22, the Parliament unanimously passed amendments to the Constitution as part of the judicial reform package, reflecting overwhelming public support for change. This was a truly historic moment and a crucial step in ensuring that Albania's judiciary is honest and functions well for all Albanian citizens. We encourage the government and parliament to complete this vital work and enact the necessary implementing legislation without delay.

Albania continues to be a committed partner in the fight against violent extremism. In 2015, the government adopted its National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism. This year, the government appointed a new Assistant to the Prime Minister and National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism, Mr. Agron Sojati, who is overseeing the implementation of Albania's National CVE Strategy. We welcome Mr. Sojati's appointment and believe that his work with educational institutions, religious groups, the media, civil society, and the government is critical. The United States is pleased to support these efforts and looks

forward to working closely with the government of Albania on its comprehensive approach to increasing tolerance and marginalizing violent extremism.

Looking toward Albania's expected parliamentary elections in 2017, the United States calls on the country's political leaders to redouble efforts to address the recommendations made by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) following parliamentary elections in June of 2013, as well as local elections in 2015. As ODIHR concluded, more work needs to be done to enhance public confidence in the electoral process, including ensuring that state resources are not abused for campaign purposes, increasing the transparency of political party and campaign finances, and implementing strict and clear laws against vote buying. These and other recommendations should be implemented well in advance of the next parliamentary elections.

Minister Bushati, the United States shares your view that the OSCE should engage the leaders of Kosovo directly. We believe that the OSCE should look for ways to expand dialogue and cooperation with Kosovo, the country that hosts the OSCE's largest permanent field mission. Officials from Kosovo should be present when issues affecting their country are discussed, which would allow them to hear directly from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and participating States. The United States also looks forward to the day when Kosovo will be present in the Permanent Council as an OSCE participating State.

Mr. Chair, the United States values its warm friendship with the Albanian government and people, and looks forward to deepening our partnership in the future.

And before concluding, Mr. Minister, let me also thank you for sending so capable a representative to work with us here in Vienna. Ravesa is a skilled and smart diplomat, and we are as fortunate to have her as a colleague as Albania is fortunate to have her as a representative.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.