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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
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VIENNA

**Report by the Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for
Co-operation Group to the twenty-eighth meeting of the
OSCE Ministerial Council**

As Chair of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group in 2021, Albania worked on further strengthening the mutual relationship and building closer co-operation aimed at an increased role of the Partners, all in compliance with the Tirana Ministerial Council Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners (MC.DOC/2/20). The Group's rolling schedule contained a rich calendar of events, which was closely consulted with the Swedish OSCE Chairmanship and with the OSCE Asian Partners. It followed a demand-driven approach to promote extensive discussions of topics and issues of common interest, and to advance joint efforts to achieve comprehensive security both within and beyond the OSCE area.

In 2021, due to the continued COVID-19 travel and meeting restrictions, all meetings of the Asian Partners for Co-operation Group were conducted in a blended format. Nonetheless, they all provided a valuable platform for information exchange, dialogue and sharing of best practices between the OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation by featuring at least one speaker from one of the Asian Partner countries, as well as presentations on the chosen topics by experts from international organizations, diplomats, academia and civil society.

The first meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 26 March 2021, dealt with the topic of "Diplomacy for common value: Importance of the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and economic co-operation" and was organized in partnership with Japan. H.E Ambassador Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the International Organizations in Vienna and Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, emphasized that this meeting provided an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned as security in Europe was inextricably linked to security in the Asian-Pacific. H.E Ambassador Ulrika Funered, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE, elaborated on the priorities of Sweden's 2021 OSCE Chairmanship by focusing on common principles and joint commitments in line with OSCE's concept of comprehensive security, including democratic principles, gender equality and conflict resolution. H.E Ambassador Akira Mizutani, Permanent Representative of Japan, noted the continued relevance of joint principles and values, particularly with view to good governance, the rule of law and economic co-operation and reiterated the crucial relevance of a strengthened co-operation between the OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Speaking on behalf of the OSCE Secretary General H.E Helga Schmid, H.E. Ambassador Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the OSCE

Secretary General, underlined that the OSCE would closely consult with the Albanian 2021 APCG Chair based on last year's Tirana Ministerial Declaration to further develop concrete steps towards a more substantive dialogue and co-operation with the Asian Partners. Good governance issues related to post-COVID-19 recovery were relevant ranging from promoting connectivity through trade and transport to enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes. Mr. Shogo Yoshitake, Director of the European Policy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, presented Japan's efforts towards a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", based on three points: first, to promote fundamental values and principles; second, to pursue economic growth; and third to strengthen maritime security. Mr. Masashi Murano, Japan Chair Fellow, Hudson Institute, commented on the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region noting that sweeping and unlawful maritime claims represented a challenge to the global security. Ms. Zorana Markovic, Regional Anti-Corruption Adviser, Corruption and Economic Crime Branch, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), presented the work of UNODC in the areas of good governance and transparency with a special focus in the Asia-Pacific region and concluded by stating that despite the different mandate, it was necessary to continue to work together in order to achieve significant changes. Following the thematic discussion, several delegations delivered their statements, commending the speakers and noting that regional and international co-operation were key to address global challenges as security in the Asia-Pacific region directly affected the comprehensive security of the OSCE region.

On 12 March, the Secretariat's Action against Terrorism Unit of the OSCE Transnational Threats Department, with the support of the Albanian Chair of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and the OSCE External Co-operation Section, organized a webinar on "Terrorist Use of the Internet: Designation of Illicit Content Online and Gaps in Regulatory Frameworks". Over 180 participants, experts and high-level officials from around the OSCE region gathered for this online event, which aimed to build on the OSCE roundtable discussion on Leveraging Innovation and Technology to Address 21st Century Security Challenges and Crises across the OSCE and Asian Partners for Co-operation held in November 2020.

An international "e-Roundtable Discussion on Combating Technology-facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings in Central Asia and across the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation" was held on 27-28 April featuring opening remarks by Mr. Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (SR-CTHB), and H.E. Ambassador Igli Hasani, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation

Group and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the International Organizations in Vienna. The two-day virtual gathering hosted more than 160 participants on behalf of governments, international organizations, academia and NGOs.

The second meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group dedicated to the topic of “Addressing non-traditional security challenges through exchange of regional experiences” took place on 4 June and was organized in partnership with Australia. H.E Ambassador Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the International Organizations in Vienna and Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group opened the meeting noting that security in the OSCE region is interlinked with the security in the Asia-Pacific and stated that co-operation between the participating States and the Asian Partners is based on two principles: wishing to share and learn from each other’s experiences and mutual gains for both parties involved. H.E Richard Sadleir, Ambassador of Australia to the Republic of Austria and Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna focused on the great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region with coercive activities posing threats to countries’ sovereignty. In order to maintain the rule of law, Regional Organizations need to build greater resilience to coercive statecraft. Professor Rory Medcalf, Head, National Security College, Australian National University, focused on Australian experience with grey zone coercion, indicating that the Indo-Pacific lessons learnt have a strong incentive to develop a shared playbook to address coercion activities elsewhere. H.E Ambassador Neil Bush, Head of the Delegation of the United Kingdom to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Security Committee noted that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges posed by transnational organized crime are rather formidable; to address these challenges an inclusive and gender-based approach must be adopted. H.E Ambassador Károly Dán, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the OSCE, the UN and other International Organizations in Vienna, Chairperson of the Informal Working Group established by PC Decision 1039, focused on the importance of platforms for regular information exchange, noting that the Inter-regional Conference, organized by the Republic of Korea is a good example of such platform. H.E Ambassador Alena Kupchyna, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats, OSCE Transnational Threats Department, stated that addressing transnational organized crime requires comprehensive and coordinated response of many actors. In the area of countering this illicit activity OSCE works with participating States, focusing on financial crimes and promoting effective application of asset seizure. The OSCE facilitates first transnational organized crime assessment and continues to promote analysis and research to help

participating States adopt most effective measures. Mr. Gledis Nano, Director of the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Albanian State Police focused on the Albania's efforts in combatting terrorism and the phenomenon of the foreign terrorist fighters, drawing attention to the country's 'Anti-Terrorism, Organized Crime/ Illegal Traffic Strategy & Action Plan 2013-2016' approved in 2013. After the thematic discussion, a number of delegations delivered their statements, commending the speakers and sharing their countries' best practices on combatting transnational organized crime.

On 22 and 23 June, the 3rd Inter-Regional Conference on Cyber/ICT Security looked into how international co-operation can lead to a more stable, predictable and safe cyberspace. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea with support of the OSCE Secretariat organized the event, held in Vienna in a virtual setting with the participation of 280 governmental and non-state representatives. The event was opened by H.E. Jongin Bae, Ambassador for International Security Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea and H.E. Alena Kupchyna, OSCE Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats as well as by Ambassador Igli Hasani, and Ambassador Károly Dán.

The third meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group was held on 2 July and was organized in partnership with Thailand. The meeting dealt with the topic of "Empowering women leadership during global health emergencies". H.E. Ambassador Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, opened the meeting and noted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences were felt differently, in particular women had suffered negative consequences. He underlined the importance to take concrete actions by equally including women's voices in the decision-making process and reiterated women's participation was necessary at every level, ranging from national crisis committees to local communities. H.E. Ambassador Morakot Sriswasdi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna, also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had wide reaching impacts on everyone's life, with women and vulnerable groups disproportionately affected, along with losing income and performing unpaid care work. H.E. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, World Health Organization (WHO), emphasized the importance to step up the progress of women leadership during global health emergencies. He stated that despite the ample evidence that health systems functioned better when women have an equal say, on average a women held only a limited

number of leadership positions in healthcare. H.E. Helga Maria Schmid, OSCE Secretary General recalled the Tirana Declaration on Co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners, which provided a clear framework to continue strengthening the political dialogue and co-operation. She offered some observations, which indicated that the leadership style of women in the COVID-19 response had been described as more collective than individual, more collaborative than competitive, and more coaching than commanding. Unfortunately, an analysis in 87 countries found that overall only 3.5% of COVID-19 experts and decision-making task forces had gender parity in their membership. The first speaker of the thematic discussion, Dr. Apisamai Srirangson, Director of Bangkok Mental Health Rehabilitation and Recovery Centre (BMRC) at Bangkok Hospital and Deputy Spokesperson of the Thailand Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), presented the work of CCSA and Thailand's response in the fight against COVID-19. Complementing the presentation by Dr. Srirangson, Dr. Soawapak Hinjoy, Director of the Office of International Cooperation at the Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, shared concrete examples on how the government engaged women in tracking the local COVID-19 transmission and took necessary measures to deal with the crisis at the community level. Mr. Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UN Women, noted that the pandemic had brought attention to the vital contribution and positive outcomes of not only including women in the response and recovery efforts but also of empowering women as leaders to respond to global health emergencies. Women had been at the center of the pandemic occupying crucial positions as educators, frontline health workers and care providers but women remained significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. H.E. Ambassador Ulrika Funered, Permanent Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council and Representative of Sweden to the OSCE, focused her statement on women's economic empowerment, as it was a key priority of the Swedish Chairpersonship, and noted the necessity to fully implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Following the thematic discussion, several delegations delivered their statements.

On 23 July, due to a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the Albanian Chair organized a Special Meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, which focused on "Regional implications of the evolving security situation in Afghanistan". Ambassador Igli Hasani, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE stated in his opening remarks that fight

against terrorism continued to pose a serious threat to the security and stability across the wider region. Therefore, it was necessary to continue to increase the international co-operation and strengthen OSCE's engagement across all three dimensions in relation to Afghanistan. Ambassador Manizha Bakhtari, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the OSCE, welcomed the strong commitment and support to Afghanistan and emphasized that sustainable peace could not be achieved without the participation and inclusion of women in decision-making. H.E. Helga Maria Schmid, OSCE Secretary General, noted that the intensified fighting in the months ahead could sharply increase the risks of a humanitarian crisis, in closer proximity to the OSCE than before. She underlined the importance to keep engaging Afghanistan through the programmatic work of the Central Asian field operations, within the mandate. Speaking on empowering women in Afghanistan, she referred to the Dushanbe Declaration at the 9th Heart of Asia – Istanbul, where Women Empowerment as Confidence-Building Measure was endorsed for the first time. The first speaker of the thematic discussion, Mr. Mirwais Nab, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, reiterated that Afghanistan's top priority was reaching a political settlement with the Taliban. Without international support, any peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban would fall apart as soon as it reached the implementation phase. Dr. Ramiz Alakbarov, UN Deputy Special Representative, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, noted that half of the Afghan population, around 18 million people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Despite circumstances, 155 humanitarian organizations were delivering assistance to Afghanistan. He emphasized the urgent need to pay attention to Afghanistan as the situation remained critical and affected the entire region. Ms. Aarvasi Patel, Head of Protection Service at the Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), noted that the situation remained volatile, which prompted the displacement of additional 300.000 internally displaced people this year and in the absence of peace and development, more people were likely forced to flee the country. Given the current environment, emergency preparedness was crucial to ensure a rapid scalable response and UNHCR continued to invest in stabilizing the local communities especially in the areas of health, education and livelihoods.

The fourth meeting of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, which took place on 3 September, focused on "The situation in Korean Peninsula" and was organized in partnership

with the Republic of Korea. Ambassador Igli Hasani, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group and Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE opened the meeting. H.E. Chae-hyun Shin, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Republic of Austria and Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna offered remarks about the *Korean Peninsula peace process* and the Republic of Korea government's efforts to strengthen cooperation with the international community. H.E. Helga Maria Schmid, OSCE Secretary General, focused on the relevance of the OSCE and its experience in promoting security and stability on a regional level, its Confidence and Security Building Measures, and its principles on non-proliferation. Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) emphasized how global and regional trends, and emerging technologies and weapons are particularly relevant for the Korean Peninsula and can lead to instability, enabling new form of conflict and increasing risks of unintended escalation. The first speaker of the thematic discussion, Mr. Kap-soo Rim, Director General for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea drew attention to the 2018 Comprehensive Military Agreement and highlighted ROK's continuous efforts to bring the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the discussion table. Ms. Elena K. Sokova, Executive Director, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) noted that despite having signed the Panmunjom Declaration in 2018, recently DPRK continued to build its nuclear and missile programs, restarted its main nuclear reactor and continued the production of plutonium. In line with the OSCE Secretary General, she also added that the OSCE experience in assisting the post-Soviet transition could be translated into the Korean context.

The 2021 OSCE Asian Conference on “Common responses to emerging challenges in advancing comprehensive security” was held in blended format (in Vienna and online) on 20 and 21 September. Organized in partnership with the Kingdom of Thailand, over 200 participants from OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation, NGOs, civil society, and international and regional organizations attended the event and looked into countering transnational organized crime; trans-border environmental risks and challenges such as environmental degradation, the unsustainable use of natural resources and climate change; and the nexus between the human rights and public health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The opening session was co-chaired by H.E. Ambassador Morakot Sriswasdi,

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna and H.E. Ambassador Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania to the OSCE, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group. Opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, H.E. Ms. Olta Xhaçka, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, H.E. Ms. Ann Linde, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Ambassador Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, and Mr. Bogusław Winid, Head of the Task Force of the Incoming Polish OSCE Chairmanship. Closing remarks were delivered by Ms. Megi Fino, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania and Mrs. Chulamane Chartsuwan, Director-General, Department of European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

The 2021 Albanian Chairmanship of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group sincerely appreciates the continued commitment and interaction of the Asian Partners and the participating States based on the commitments reflected in the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Declaration on Co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners. By wishing the best of success to the incoming Swedish Chair of the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation Group, Albania encourages continuing towards concrete and project-oriented interaction with the Asian Partners including streamlined cooperation with other regional organizations.