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**Statement**

**by**

**the Head of Delegation of the Republic of Albania**

**Statement by Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Mrs. Artemis Dralo**

**Geneva, 6 May 2019**

**Honourable Mr. President,**

**Honourable Members states and observer states of the Human Rights Council,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, permit me, Mr. President, to extend the highest appreciation of Albania’s Government on the activity of the Human Rights Council. We believe that the Universal Periodic Review is a unique process, which provides an additional opportunity for the countries to promote and uphold human rights and universal fundamental freedoms.

We consider the review under UPR as an opportunity to present the progress, difficulties and challenges situation in implementing the recommendations of the second cycle of UPR**.** Preparing for the process has been a valuable exercise in taking stock of where we stand on the implementation of our commitments, in integrating human rights in our development policies, and in viewing progress and areas where more needs to be done.

I would like also to thank the countries which submitted the advance questions, giving us the possibility to inform you on the measures to improve the human rights in Albania.

Now permit me to express the distinct honour and pleasure making the presentation of third national periodic report, namely recent measures undertaken since the second UPR review in 2014. The Albanian delegation is composed by different representatives from the Parliament, Ministry For Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Ambassador of Permanent Mission of Albania in Geneva, and the representatives of our Mission, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Youth, Ministry of Culture, General Prosecution Office, Office of the Commissioner for the Protection from the Discrimination, State Police General Department, General Department of Prisons.

Albania is fully committed to protect and promote all human rights and supports the integration of the human rights dimension in the agenda of United Nations. As a member of Human Rights Council for the period 2015-2017, Albania has contributed actively in this important forum, and its decision process, including Universal Periodic Review.

**For the first time, Albania will take over the OSCE Chairmanship in 2020.** The unanimous decision to support the Albania in chairing the OSCE in 2020, is a clear indication of the Albania’s active role in multilateral forums, its constructive approach in the region and beyond, as well as the contributions offered by Albania in addressing the current challenges faced by European security and stability. Particular attention will be paid to the promotion of universality and inseparability and respect for fundamental human rights, the fight against discrimination and intolerance.

**Distinguished delegations**

During the reporting period, a series of measures are taken to improve the legal framework, policy and institutional framework, in accordance with the human rights conventions and the UPR specific recommendations.

Protection of human rights, especially focused on women`s rights, gender equality, domestic violence, the rights of the child, anti-discrimination, national minorities, the rights of vulnerable groups, and other, civil, political and economic, social, cultural are on the core of our priorities towards EU integration, and in compliance with international obligations.

We are undertaking concrete steps to implement justice reform which have a direct impact in strengthening the rule of law, human rights, consolidation of democracy, sustainable political, economic and social development in the country with concrete impact on the daily live of the people.

The independent institutions as Ombudsman and the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination have a significant and proactive role in promoting and protecting human rights.

The Government of Albania in the last five years has taken a number of important measures in different areas.

# Justice system reform

Through the approval of Law No 76/2016 “On some addenda and amendments to Law No 8417/1998 “Constitution of the Republic of Albania” Albania started the implementation of the justice system reform. The constitutional amendments and the package of 7 organic laws adopted in the framework of the justice reform, contain clearly defined provisions that guarantee independence, impartiality, professionalism, integrity of the judicial system, as well as improvement of the accountability and monitoring mechanisms of its functioning. In addition, a package of 23 laws, covering all aspects of the judicial reform, have been approved by the Albanian parliament.

The judiciary of Albania is currently undergoing a comprehensive and thorough transitional re-evaluation process (vetting). The re-evaluation of judges, prosecutors and legal advisors was launched with the overall objectives of strengthening professionalism across the sector, eradicating corruption, consolidating independence and impartiality and, ultimately, rebuilding public confidence in the judiciary.

The implementation of the justice reform remains one of the main priorities of the Albanian government, by guaranteeing the necessary support for the improvement of the legal framework and the functioning of the new justice bodies.

**Gender equality and empowerment of women.** The main achievements in this regard are:

* **Improvement of the national legal framework in accordance with the ratified international documents as well as in aligning it with Acquis Communitaire of the European Union.**
* Law "On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations" adopted in July 2018 and the completion of the sub-legal framework, which are aimed at greater protection of children, persons with disabilities and women ; improving the role of responsible structures to provide coordinated response to domestic violence cases; improving the procedural deadlines for issuing Defence Orders and Immediate Protection Orders etc;
* Law "On State Legal Assistance", which entered into force on June 1, 2018 strengthened access to justice by providing legal opportunities to all eligible categories such as victims of domestic violence, sexually abused victims, victims of trafficking in human beings, juvenile victims and juveniles in conflict with the law at every stage of criminal proceedings benefit legal aid, regardless of their income and wealth.
* The Law "On Social Housing Programs", 2018, foresees with priority the inclusion in social criteria that benefit from social housing programs: victims of domestic violence; victims of trafficking / potential victims of trafficking; mother mothers; individuals belonging to the LGBTI community.
* Amendments in 2015 of the Labour Code brought about significant improvements in overcoming the burden of proof in cases of discrimination in employment where the employer always has the burden of proof to prove that the principle of equal treatment at work has not been violated. Provision is made for measures to be taken by employers to prevent sexual harassment, greater protection measures for pregnant women and maternity, as well as recognition of postnatal leave for fathers.
* **Implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020.** This strategy is based on 4 strategic goals and sets concrete interventions in terms of economic empowerment of women and men; ensuring equal participation and engagement in political and public decision-making processes; reduction of gender-based violence and domestic violence; strengthening the coordinating and monitoring role of the national gender equality mechanism.
* **The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020, is intended to promote qualitative jobs and skills for all (a) women and men throughout the life cycle.** Attention is paid to taking concrete measures to include certain groups such as: disabled people, Roma women, young people.
* **Albania has adopted the National Sector Strategy for Social Protection 2015-2020.** This strategy prioritizes vulnerable families and groups, such as: women-headed households; families at risk of exclusion, including Roma; children and adults with disabilities; children who live and work on the streets and do not go to school, children in legal conflicts, children and women affected by domestic violence, long-term unemployed; individuals infected with HIV or abusers of narcotic substances; the elderly without support.
* "Action Plan for Supporting Entrepreneurial Women 2014-2020", consists of five main pillars targeting incentive policies for women entrepreneurs; training and education programs; increased access to finance through greater involvement in current / new financial support schemes; creation of a network of actors supporting women entrepreneurs; as well as the support of women in rural areas.
* **Increase specialized support services for the treatment of victims / survivors of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.**

Support services for victims of domestic violence have been improved, taking into account the standards of the Istanbul Convention, mentioning the establishment and functioning of the National Center for Victims of Domestic Violence, the Counselling Line for Victims of Domestic Violence - Free Telephone Number 116 117, emergency centers in some municipalities, legal services provided by NGOs or the Free Legal Aid Commission. Finally, it is worth mentioning the establishment and operation of the first crisis management center for victims of sexual violence. This is a one-stop service 24-72 hours, specializing in treating the victims of sexual violence.

During this period, we are focused on the advancement of: gender budgeting issues; capacity building of gender officers at central and local level; extension of the coordinated referral mechanism for domestic violence in the municipalities of the country; continuation and well-coordinated awareness raising campaigns on gender equality and gender-based violence and domestic violence.

**The rights of the child**

The Law “On the Rights and Protection of the Child” has entered into force in June 2017 extends the scope of children's rights, while emphasizing the strengthening of the system of the protection of children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, especially in the local level.

The **new Law no. 121/2016 “On Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania”** regulates the social care services, by stimulating the welfare and social inclusion of the people in need and their families in social care. Special focus has been put on children’s support and empowerment.

**The transformation of residential social care institutions** into alternative services has started, through foster care services and the establishment of multi-functional centers. To fulfil this objective, the ‘Policy Document for the Deinstitutionalisation of the Residential Social Care System’ and its three-year Action Plan have been compiled.

For the first time, measures have been provided for the parental rehabilitation, aiming the return of children put into alternative care to their families, through the family's empowerment and support, or through intervention to improve family relations if the child still lives in it.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, from the beginning of 2019, has started the distribution of the “Baby Bonus” for newborn children, a cash payment for every newborn child.

The adoption of **the Code of Criminal Justice for Children**, strengthens the judiciary system by bringing it closer to international standards and other norms, which aim at protecting children in contact with the law.

The adoption of several law in the field of child rights was accompanied by the adoption of strategic documents such as the new Action Plan, referred to in the National Agenda for Children’s Rights 2017-2020.

**The protection of children from economic exploitation has been enforced through the adoption of the new law on the rights and protection of the child**, while the National Agenda includes plans on the development of guides, so that the children’s forced labour be evaluated in the local level by Child Protection Units (CPUs).

Currently, a National Action Plan on the Protection of Children from economic exploitation, including children in street situations has been drafted. A Decision of the Council of Ministers in the beginning of 2019 has enabled the adoption of procedures that must be followed by local actors for the identification and provision of assistance to economically abused children and children in street situations.

Through the adoption of the new Law no. 18/2017 “On the Rights and Protection of the Child”, **children under the age of criminal responsibility** are considered as a category of children in need of special protection. Through a Decision of the Council of Ministers, in the beginning of 2019, there were adopted the procedures and specifications for the protection of these children.

The improvements in the Criminal Code and the Decision of the Council of Ministers adopted in the beginning of 2019, as part of a package of sub-legal acts that enforce the Law “On the Rights and Protection of the Child”, include harsher punitive measures toward child abusers, including the **online abuse of children**. The measures aim at protecting children from online abuse or sexual exploitation, as well as their protection from access to harmful and illegal content online.

Another category that profits from the new legislation are **unaccompanied foreign children who are within Albanian territory, and unaccompanied Albanian children outside the territory.** The latest Decision of the Council of Ministers defines the structures in national and local level, as well as the procedures to be followed for the return, repatriation or family reunification of these children.

The improvements in the **Law on Civil Status, address the existing causes of the non-registration and statelessness.** In particular, the amendments empower the Albanian courts to regulate the registration of Albanian children with incorrect data who come from other countries. An electronic register has been created for the first time, thus enabling the new born’ immediate registration in the maternity hospital.

The Child Protection Units are required to undertake the registration procedures in cases when parents do not register their child within 60 days.

In the framework of the child’s protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, **there is an ongoing improvement of the performance of the child protection’s integrated system.** The Child Protection Workers in the national level are the main professional figures for the management of cases of children in need of protection.

The provision of the service by Child Protection Units for children in need of protection is under continuous monitoring by the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child (SARPC). Currently, there are **235 child protection workers** all across the country. In 2018, the Child Protection Units have processed **1897 cases** of children in need of protection from violence, abuse or exploitation, out of which **997 were new cases**.

For the purpose of **addressing the budget allocations for structures and services for children** in a local level, the Law No. 121/2016 ‘On Social Care Services’ provides for a special fund in the municipality level. This fund will serve as a new financial mechanism for the provision of social services of a higher quality and responsiveness toward the needs of individuals.

**The identification of cases of children in need and t**he recognition, knowledge of the law and the coordination of local institutions during management process is quite important in providing an effective protection for children endangered by violence, abuse or exploitation.

**Mr. President,**

**Distinguished delegations**

We consider that protection of minority language rights should be guaranteed in connection with the right to equal protection through law and before the law, the right to be protected against discrimination based on ethnic origin and other grounds, including language, the right to education, the access to the media, and the participation in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs.

While inter-ethnic relations continued to be good, Albania significantly improved the legal and policy framework for the protection of minorities by adopting on 13 October 2017 and entering into force on 24 November 2017 a specific law on national minorities, based on international expertise and followed by a comprehensive consultation process with different stakeholders, including minority representatives.

Albanian institutions consider the constructive dialogue with the Advisory Committee, as well the findings and recommendations provided in its fourth Opinion on Albania as effective tools to ensure compliance with international obligations. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee support states parties of the Framework Conventions in encouraging them to respect minority rights by creating appropriate conditions to preserve minority identity, minority languages, the education in minority languages, as well to ensure equal access to their specific rights and resources and for inclusive societies despite difference.

Following the adoption of the law on national minorities, **Albanian institutions are working on the preparation of secondary legislation**, in order to ensure the implementation of this framework law and minority rights in practice.

**During the year 2018 are adopted three project decisions, as below:**

* Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 561, dated 29.09.2018 “On equipment of students with school texts, continuous professional development of teachers, and creation and functioning of school classes in the language of the national minorities”.
* Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 562, date 29.09.2018 “On adequate measures for the promotion of culture, history, language and religion of national minorities in the educational and scientific activity of the institutions of higher education”.
* Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 726, date 12.12.2018 “On the organization and functioning of the Committee for National Minorities”.

Other Secondary legislation (bylaws) foreseen to be adopted on the implementation of the law no. 96/2017 “For the protection of national minorities in Albania” (within the first period of the 2019) are as below:

Currently the competent institutions are following the internal legal procedures of consultation in order to submit within the first period of the year 2019, the remaining project decisions before the Council of Minister.

C**ollection of data**

The law on national minorities clearly provide that: 1. In order to guarantee the rights of national minorities, the public institutions at central and local level shall collect data regarding the identification of persons belonging to national minorities, based **on the right to self-identification of such persons and the documentation of the Civil Registry, pursuant to paragraph 2 of Article 6 of this Law** and the legislation on the protection of personal data. In particular, it is important to clearly **define the objective criteria and documentation of Civil Registry** during different period of time and their relevance, based on the law on national minorities.

**The right of self-identification**

This law guarantees the right to declare his or her belonging to a national minority. Persons belonging to national minorities, based on the right of self- identification, can declare his/her belonging to a national minority during the general census of the population in the Republic of Albania. Therefore all domestic legislation, including the legislation on the census will be revised in line with European standards.

**The right of education**:

Persons belonging to national minorities, in self-government units where they live traditionally or in substantial numbers, are ensured opportunities to be taught in or to receive instructions in their minority language. Law on national minorities and the secondary legislation provides for the right to education in the minority language.

**Beside the two decision on education of persons belonging to national minorities**, the project Council of Ministers Decision on the criteria for determining the local self-governing unit, the substantial number and the adequate requests in order to the possibility to learn or to take lessons in the minority language, which will be adopted soon, provides the criteria for the opening of national minority classes/schools. This project decision foresees the number of 15 pupils for the opening of a minority class, and other criteria where national minorities live traditionally or constitute over 20% of the general number of the population of this **administrative unit**.

**Use of minority language**

Persons belonging to national minorities have the right to use their language in relation with administrative authorities in those self-governing units where they live traditionally or constitute over 20% of the general number of the population of this unit, upon a decision of the self-government bodies, when relevant conditions permit and there is a sufficient demand.

The Framework Convention on National Minorities and European practice provide for specific minority rights that may be put in place in a certain entity of local government. The law addresses the exercise of these rights in full conformity with FCNM provisions and based upon the relevant European experiences. Specifically, the persons belonging to national minorities, in self-government units where they live traditionally or in substantial numbers, have the right to be taught in or to receive instructions in their minority language. They enjoy the right to use officially their language in various aspects in those self-governing administrative units where they live traditionally or constitute over 20% of the general number of the population of this unit, upon a decision of the self-government organs, when relevant conditions permit and there is a sufficient demand. The threshold adopted by the law not only is a generally accepted standard in relevant European experiences but also a principle recommended by the expertise offered by the Council of Europe.

Ministry of Culture each year calls for application on project proposals in different fields as; culture, art, cultural heritage, gender, diversity and specific project for vulnerable groups.

The next Population and Housing Census will take place in 2020, and will be conducted on the basis of a new specific law. Regarding **the question on ethnicity,** the legal framework on the Population and Housing Census will be in conformity with the principle of the self –identification and the right to a person belonging to a national minority to freely choose to be treated or not to be treated as such, in accordance with the law on national minorities and the FCNM, as well international standards.

The census of 2020 Article 4 of the draft law on census provides: 1. The census questionnaire is the instrument drafted by INSTAT and reflected in the annual plan, according to Article 9 of Law No.17 / 2018, "On official statistics", which contains mandatory questions and requests for the collection of the information necessary for the production of population and housing official statistics. 2. The census questionnaire may contain questions about the ethnic group, religion and languages whose responses are based on the free and non-mandatory declaration of the individual. These questions shall contain the answer option for the respondent "I prefer not to answer".

Article 22 of the draft law on census in relation with the contraventions provides clearly the violations that constitute an administrative offense and are punishable. We underline that according to the paragraph 2 of the article 22 of this draft law there is not any provision which stipulate fines for “incorrect” answers with regard the question about the ethnicity.

The preparation of draft law on the Population census 2020 is followed by a consultative process, including consultative meeting with minorities and ethno-cultural groups. In the coming period will be organized information campaigns on this process, including the possibility of self-identification of the individuals.

**Roma and Egyptian minority**

Government of Albania aims at reduction of poverty and discrimination to provide for the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. Social Inclusion Policy Document 2016-2020 is a national monitoring framework with inclusion indicators in Albania including indicators on poverty reduction, employment, health, education, basic needs, participation and human rights are tackled through a cross-disciplinary approach.

National Action Plan on Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 includes objectives on inclusion, civil registration, promotion of employment, entitlement to social benefits (health insurance coverage, housing, monitoring and coordination. For data collection, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has established the ROMALB electronic system with data on indicators of the "National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania, 2016-2020".

On December 15, 2018, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) started the preparation of the third monitoring report (2018) for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania 2016 – 2020.

The Ministry of Culture, from 2014, develops and supports policies and implements the "national Cultural Education Program", aiming at comprehensive inclusion of of young children. This ACTION Plan is in line with the CRC Convention and UNESCO Convention and the Declaration of the Council of Ministers of Culture of South East Europe. A Memorandum of Cooperation on Education through arts and heritage is signed between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Sports. This memorandum aims to encourage cultural and educational institutions to encourage students' interest in participating in cultural and artistic life by ensuring the provision of adequate and equal opportunities in cultural life and the creation of creative spaces.

**Housing**

In May 2018 a new law no. 22/2018 “On social housing” was approved. The law enhances its focus of vulnerable groups by extending the typology of housing programmes that can be supported by local and national government. Moreover, the law is more targeted towards social and vulnerable groups, compared to the previous law and provides direct and indirect benefits for vulnerable groups, as victims of domestic violence;

victims/potential trafficking victims; vulnerable group, etc.

**Trafficking of human beings**

Improvement of the legal framework and its correct implementation:

* On January 1, 2018, the Criminal Justice for Children Code containing special arrangements regarding juvenile delinquency, procedural rules regarding investigation, prosecution, the execution of a criminal sentence, the rehabilitation of any other measure involving juveniles in conflict with the law, as well as juvenile victims or witnesses of the criminal offense.
* By Decision of Council of Ministers No 499 of 29.08.2018 “On the Adoption of Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking”, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were adopted.
* By Decision of Council of Ministers No 770 of 26.12.2018 “On the adoption of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2018 – 2020” was adopted. The activities envisaged in MARD 2018 – 2020 are intended to improve the functioning of a comprehensive system through the identification, protection and reintegration mechanism of trafficking victims. Preventive activities in this Action Plan address awareness raising and public information on national legislation and International Anti-Trafficking Conventions, all forms of trafficking in persons (internal trafficking, forced labour for children and adults, begging by children, children in street situation, etc), as well as its consequences.

**Protection and Assistance**

Protection and assistance to victims / potential victims of trafficking is provided in four shelters, including reintegration services such as psychological, health, legal, vocational training, mediation for family reunion, employment and education, potential victims and victims of trafficking, foreign or domestic, children or adults, male or female.

The National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking is a state-run centre under the State Social Service and is funded entirely by the state budget.

**Distinguished delegations**

**In relation to the fight against the phenomenon of blood feud** several measures have been implemented. A database of all families affected by the phenomenon of blood feud has been compiled at the General Directorate of State Police, including the rules of procedure regarding the recording in the database of the information on individuals suspected of criminal activities motivated by blood feud. Training of police officers on issues of blood feud has been planned and updated data will be included in the database. The Action Plan no. 2057, dated 19.12.2018 "On the prevention, detection, documentation and fight against the criminal activity committed for blood feud and vengeance" aims to advance the fight against the phenomenon of blood feud and revenge through close cooperation with local government and non-profit organizations, resolve conflict resolution, strengthen the cooperation with the prosecution office for the investigation of the related criminal offenses and prosecution of perpetrators, organize comprehensive measures to capture perpetrators, strengthen cooperation with education departments and schools for the education of younger generations etc.

In the framework of measures to prevent and fight the phenomenon of trafficking in persons, Anti-Trafficking structures have strengthened their investigative capacities to increase the early identification inside and outside the country based on the Standard Operating Procedures. Anti-Trafficking awareness activities have been supported by the police, such as the public slogan "Trafficking in persons is a crime. Join yourself to stop it.” A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed on October 21, 2014 between the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the General Director of Labour Inspectorate and the Director General of State Police on the cooperation procedures for the identification of cases of forced labor and trafficking, identification of the potential victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, or other services, etc.

Cooperation at the regional level and larger, as well as the exchange of police information with accredited contact officers in Albania continue to serve as tools for the identification of suspected persons involved in criminal activity of trafficking in persons and other criminal offenses related to as well as for identifying potential victims of trafficking in destination countries.

In relation to the fight against domestic and gender based violence, measures have been taken to improve protection for victims and prosecute against violators. Since 2014, the State Police has adopted and implements Annual Action Plans, in implementation of the National Strategy Action Plan "On Gender Equality and Reduction of Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence.

With regard to the strengthening of referral mechanisms, as well as specialized support services for the protection of victims of violence and handling of cases the State Police collects, administers and processes statistical data on offenses, perpetrators and victims (injured parties). The collected data on perpetrators and victims are divided according to criminal offenses, gender, age, place of residence, the connection of the perpetrator with the victim (statistical register of domestic violence cases.

**The right of education**

Several important legal initiatives have been undertaken in the last five years to improve and advance the effectiveness of the educational system in Albania. Law no. 69 / 29.06.2012 "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", has been amended providing more effective mechanisms in relation to the implementation of the constitutional right to education for all without distinction. Several activities have been undertaken to reach objective no. 4 under the Agenda 2020-2030" with the primary objective to ensure quality, equal and inclusive education by promoting lifelong learning opportunities, integration of children with disabilities into mainstream educational system of kindergarten and schools; implementation of inclusive education; reduction of violence in schools; raising awareness of the community about forms of violence and its effect on children's behaviour, implementation of an environmental education program as an integral part of education; creation of a safe teaching environment to combat violence and extremism in the education system; reduction of the drop-out in pre-university education institutions, etc.

**The rights of persons with disabilities**

The Reform of Modernization of Social Assistance and the disability assessment reform aim at applying the bio-psycho-social assessment across the territory. Regarding services, Law no. 93/2014, provides for independent living, providing support in overcoming the barriers towards.

Disability Assessment Reform aims at applying a bio-psycho-social assessment and its application across the territory. Community-based services rely on the principles of the social model of disability, accommodation for people with disabilities, buildings and attitudes.

Several measures are taken in relation with the enforcement of law in the institutions of the execution of penal decisions and thus imply zero tolerance to any form of abuse of any official; Improvement of the infrastructure and treatment of persons with limited freedom; Improving the overall performance of prisons through strengthening professional staff capacities and by providing transparent recruitment procedures based on meritocracy and moral and professional integrity.

There is a significant improvement in the conditions for the treatment of persons with limited freedom. One of the main problems of the prison system such as overcrowding has been eliminated and today we are reporting we are at the conditions of prisons' depopulation, -900 places, or -14%. The elimination of overcrowding in prisons has come as a result of concrete measures or investments, such as the opening of the new prison in Shkodra, the investment of the European Union and the Albanian Government, as well as the construction of two new buildings in Tirana, an investment of the Albanian Government, and through the case-by-case investigation of a careful study of the distribution and accommodation of prisoners in the penitentiary institutions.

**Distinguished delegations.**

**In relation with the conduct of future elections** **we inform that the** Parliament of Albania, by its decision no.102 / 2017 established the Ad –Hoc Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform, with the object of its activity to draft amendments to the electoral legal framework.

On 18 December 2018, majority MPs, members of the Ad –Hoc Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform submitted to Parliament the draft law “ On some addenda and amendments to Law no. 10019 “ On Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania”, drafted on the basis of the reports and recommendations of the OSCE / ODIHR on elections held in Albania, on the recommendations of the experts, the civil society, and the problems raised by different political parties.

**In relation with the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up of UPR recommendations, and other UN human rights Treaty Bodies,** the issuance of UPR 2nd Cycle recommendations to Albania in 2014, made apparent the need for a tracking mechanisms on these and other key treaty bodies recommendations. The Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania with the support of UN Women and UNFPA developed a Human Rights Action Plan and Monitoring Mechanism to facilitate the monitoring process of the implementation of the UPR recommendations and other treaties by relevant State authorities. We further plan to develop this national mechanism, including the reinforcement of national structures focusing on the implementation and monitoring of the recommendations.

The protection and promotion of human rights remains a priority of the Government of Albania, and the Albanian authorities will continue to fulfil the international obligations by attaching priority to the implementation of legal and policy framework, the increase of public awareness, strengthening the cooperation among different stakeholders.

**Thank you for the attention!**