Defence Minister Imami presented in Brussels the achievements in the dismantling process of munitions

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Defense Minister, Mr. Arben Imami, was invited to a meeting organized by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, in the NATO HQ in Brussels, to present the results achieved by Albania in the dismantling process of munitions. At this meeting chaired by the NATO Secretary General, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen attended the ambassadors of NATO member and partner countries. In his speech held at the meeting, Defense Minister Imami thanked all participants and especially the Secretary General of NATO, Mr. Rasmussen for the opportunity offered to present at the Alliance HQ one of the most significant experiences of the Albanian Armed Forces: the demilitarization process.

“As you are well aware, Albanian Armed Forces, due to the Cold War era, had inherited a structure that exceeded its capacities and mission. The number of units, properties, weapons, equipments and manpower that belonged to the AAF was not only totally inefficient, but on the contrary was harmful to the capacity building of the Armed Forces. For this reason, especially after the membership to NATO, our Armed Forces needed a complete transformation, to meet the requirements of the Alliance for a well-trained, well-equipped, deployable and inter-operable Force”, stated Minister Imami.

In addition, Minister Imami emphasized that, today I will not talk about all transformation process, but I will rather concentrate on the most important one, the most essential and the most laborious: the destruction, evacuation and collection of excess munitions, explosives, weapons, major armaments, and other hazardous chemicals. I consider this as the most important process first and foremost because the obsolete ammunitions were a risk to the security and stability not only for our country, but for the entire Balkan region. He noted that, after taking office as Minister of Defense in 2009, the first and non-negotiable objective was the destruction of 100 thousand tons of surplus munitions and that Albania, as a member of NATO, should provide security to the region. There should be no room for any accidents, loss of life or disturbance of stability of any kind. Mr. Imami added that, it was clear in my mind that the Armed Forces should be freed of the burden inherited from the past, in order to be able to concentrate on strategic planning, training, and exercises fulfilling thus their mission.

Then, Minister Imami stopped on the Action Plan for multi-annual demilitarization and its objectives such as: classification of munitions by their the condition (risk assessment); destroy or evacuate first the most old and decayed munitions; empty the warehouses nearby the populated areas; concentrate the rest of ammunition in well-kept and accessible storages;

assure that open detonation be conducted in remote and isolated locations; assure safety and security to the highest standards; protect the environment; assure full transparency to the public opinion, etc. “Understanding the importance of this process, we established a Steering Board chaired by a Deputy Minister with full administrative authority to deal only with the demilitarization process. All three former military factories were adapted and modernized to perform industrial demilitarization of several support elements and engineering troops with around 800 personnel involved in this successful process. Until September of 2009, we demilitarized 2,300 tons, in the end of the year the amount of ammunition demilitarized was 6,500 tons, and in 2010, it was 20,600 tons”, declared Mr. Imami.

Taking advantage of this meeting, Minister Imami expressed his gratitude to all organizations, allies and partners that have contributed to this process: United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Hungary, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Turkey, EU and OSCE. The strong support provided by the NATO Support Agency, the International Trust Fund, the Office for Weapons Reduction and Abatement, and the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency, were also instrumental to our continuing success.

“We are proud that the Albanian Armed Forces are looking now towards the common future we share with the Alliance and on our side, we are ready to share our experience in order to contribute to the interest of NATO members and partner countries. We have all the possibilities to use our facilities, and our personnel as an NICHE capability, our industrial demilitarization facilities can serve as a Centre of Excellence of NATO, as they are the most modern and advanced technologically in the region. Albania is prepared to take in consideration the possibility of offering our established capabilities to the countries of the region and broader, which have similar problems. I can emphasize and assure you that our methods on demilitarization make possible a safe, low-cost and environmentally friendly process”, concluded his speech Defense Minister, Mr. Arben Imami.

In addition, Major Shkëlqim Sina presented to the participants a detailed briefing about the processes, partnership, achievements and further development of human and technological resources that Albania has created over the years in the field of dismantling of armaments and surplus munitions.

In his address, Mr. Scott Willason, who represented the NATO Support Agency, former NAMSA, praised Albania’s excellent results in the field of dismantling and the role played by NAMSA to support this process through the International Trust Fund.

Albania’s presentation awoke great interest to the member states and representatives present at this meeting, as from Slovenia, USA, Montenegro, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Spain, Armenia, Moldova and more others. All NATO ambassadors highlighted the excellent results of Albania, the impressive figures, maximum safety and professionalism of the Albanian specialists, all these indicators of an excellent work of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces. They thanked Minister Imami who raised the discussion of this process in the appropriate political level, and commended the Albanian government for the political will. The ambassadors agreed that the dismantling and experience gained by

Albania in this process should be seen in regional perspective. They also stressed that cooperation of Albania with partner countries during this process is a clear example and should serve as an incentive for cooperation in the field of security and stability. The ambassadors also stressed that NATO can play a principal role in this regard and the Trust Fund mechanism is a mechanism that has shown it can do good, as long as security and stability issues affect equally all member and partner countries.

Earlier, Defense Minister, Mr. Arben Imami, had a meeting with the NATO Secretary General, Mr. Rasmussen. Secretary Rasmussen assessed the contribution of Albania, already a member of NATO, especially in Afghanistan. He praised the four year work related to the ongoing transformation of the Armed Forces, taking into account, he said, the specific challenges Albania passed through because of its past.

On his part, Minister Imami expressed to Secretary Rasmussen his gratitude to facilitate this activity and shared the latest achievements of the Albanian Armed Forces, noting that AAF have already left the past behind and her attention is entirely focused towards the future. Minister Imami assured the NATO Secretary General for the determination of Albania to contribute after 2014 in Afghanistan, through the experience gained from OMLT missions and other ones. He also assured him for the financial support of the Albanian government for the establishment and strengthening of the Afghan Security Forces.