

**Joint Training Course for Albanian and Serbian Representatives of Youth organizations on “Using Digital Skills to promote OSCE Values”**

**Grußwort Susanne Schütz**

**Botschafterin, Deutsche Botschaft Tirana**

**Tirana, 19. September 2016**

Dear Robert Wilton,

Dear Leslie Hess,

Ambassador Zaric,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all tonight in my residence on the occasion of the Joint Training Course for Albanian and Serbian Representatives of Youth organizations on “Using Digital Skills to promote OSCE Values”. First of all I would like to thank the OSCE presence here in Tirana as well as the Belgrade OSCE mission for this important and timely initiative and its perfect organization. As Germany holds the OSCE chairmanship still until the end of this year I am particularly pleased to be able to contribute to the work of the OSCE by supporting dialogue and networking projects such as this.

The OSCE values, which are at the core of this seminar, go back to the Charter of Helsinki which more than 40 years ago in 1975 laid the foundation for stability, security and the respect for human rights in all of Europe and essentially contributed to overcoming the cold war division between East and West. When dictatorships in Europe finally fell at the end of the 80s/beginning of the 90s hopes were high that peace and stability would prevail. However, new conflicts evolved and challenged Europe, the Western Balkans region in particular. Committed to its values the OSCE and its field missions in the region took up these challenges and have been playing up to this date a very positive role in the Western Balkans. Thanks to their engaged work they contributed actively to conflict prevention and conflict management, strengthening prevention capabilities and facilitating, among other things, a constructive dialogue across borders as well as across ethnic and religious groups.

The German OSCE chairmanship – while naturally putting a strong focus on the violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine – set out to strengthen the OSCE capabilities and made the inclusion of civil society organisations, think tanks, private foundations as well as youth organisations in conflict prevention and resolution a priority.

This seminar fits well into the ongoing normalization process between Albania and Serbia which has already led to a significant decrease in tensions. In order for this normalization process to be sustainable, however, relations at the top government level need to be supported by people to people contacts, including, dialogue and partnerships at the local level, involving especially, the younger generation which is building a different future in Europe based on common values.

As part of the so called Berlin process the participating countries, at their latest summit in Paris in July of this year signed a Memorandum of Understanding to set up a “Regional Youth Cooperation Office” - short RYCO – in order to foster youth exchange programmes in this region. If everything goes well the organisation should take up its work in Tirana already by the beginning of next year and soon start very concrete exchange programmes. I am proud that Germany and France were able to contribute to this initiative by providing their very successful experience of the German-French Youth Exchange after the second World War.

Having said this I am particularly pleased that thanks to this seminar the OSCE has brought together young civil society representatives to join forces in using social networks in order to promote these values. The importance of social media for fast and cross border distribution of information is rapidly growing, especially among young people. Thus, I am convinced that this seminar is just the beginning of a larger cooperation across the entire Western Balkan region.

Before I will hand over the to Robert Wilton to speak for the OSCE presence in Albania I would like to wish the participants of the seminar a successful continuation of their work and all of us a pleasant and interesting event.

Thank you for your attention.