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The Republic of Kosovo's Written Statement for the Summit for Democracy Commitments

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1. Introduction: Transcript of official intervention by President Vjosa Osmani at the virtual Summit

The Republic of Kosovo is one of the youngest yet most vibrant democracies in the world.

In 2022, Kosovo will mark 14 years of independence, but we have fought authoritarian and genocidal regimes for much longer than that. Democracy is in the fabric of our society, it is deeply entrenched in our historic struggle for freedom and human rights. And, as envisioned by our founding father, President Rugova, our Republic stands strongly on three pillars: freedom, independence and democracy.

Kosovo today continues to thrive through free and fair elections, with peaceful transitions of power, unfettered media freedoms, and the highest standards of human rights enshrined in our constitution.

But, democracy is never a finished or finite project. So today, I set out Kosovo's commitments for strengthening and nurturing our democracy to ensure it stands the test of time. We will:

- 1. Strengthen the rule of law** through the full implementation of the Strategy on Rule of Law, and a vetting process that will instill integrity, impartiality and professionalism at the heart of our justice system. We commit to enacting and implementing advanced legislation to seize illicit wealth, impose a travel ban on foreign individuals involved in serious human rights abuses, clamp down on foreign governments' funding for political parties and ban public institutions from using untrusted surveillance vendors.
- 2. Bolster the role of women in our society** by initiating proceedings to harmonize all relevant laws with the provisions of the law on gender equality, to guarantee women's rightful place in public institutions and decision-making roles. We will also adopt a bold national strategy against gender-based violence to implement the Istanbul Convention, to halt this epidemic through prevention and protection, and increase minimum sentences to reflect the severity of the gender-based crimes.

3. **I will establish a Presidential Council on Democracy and Human Rights** that will bring together public institutions and civil society to drive and monitor the implementation of our commitments. This council shows our long-term commitment to improving our democracy.

We must not take democracy for granted, and we must relentlessly protect it. Whether a big or small a country, we can all make a difference, especially if we join forces. We are, therefore, pledging to work with you all to deliver on our objectives, share best practices, counter Russian interference and propaganda, and promote peace around the world.

In this spirit, I will host a global Summit for Women in Peace and Security in 2022 that will bring together leaders from around the world.

In the struggle between democracy and autocracy, history teaches us that appeasement of autocrats never works. Today is more than a Summit, it is our collective voice rejecting autocratic tendencies, and it is our collective voice standing up for democracy.

2. Background and situational analysis

The Republic of Kosovo, the newest and youngest country in Europe – just under 14 years old – is proud to be among the most vibrant and thriving democracies not only in the region, but also beyond.

Accountable governance, the amplification of economic opportunities, and a dignified living, the three main principles promoted by the Summit for Democracy, stand as guiding principles in Kosovo's state-building journey.

Various credible international reports and analysts have largely assessed Kosovo's democratic development as positive and progressive. For example, according to Freedom House reports on the change in democracy score of nations in transit, Kosovo scored an overall +11 from 2017 to 2021.

In just over a decade since its independence, Kosovo stands out as a country where the top institutions put rule of law at the center of their work, a country that protects and promotes human rights, and is steadfast in its commitment to embrace transformative actions through policy-making that is centered on sustainable development and social reforms.

Democratic and competitive elections were observed in a series of electoral processes held in Kosovo. These processes stood out for the conduct of the candidates and voters during the campaign and election process, and ultimately, a smooth and civilized transition of power at the national and local level. The latest parliamentary elections also brought forward a record number of elected women MPs, as well as a woman President and a record number of women ministers.

It is also important to highlight that Kosovo is committed and determined to embracing and guaranteeing civil liberties. As such, it is recognized for its active media and civil society sectors which hold broad and diverse viewpoints and operate in an environment which truly enables freedom of expression.

With that said, as we have seen from even the most established democracies in the world, democracy is never a finished or finite project. The people and the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo recognize there is more work to be done within Kosovo, the region and beyond. With the ever-rising destabilizing tendencies and the ever-present malign actors in the region, fighting disinformation and other foreign illiberal influences stand at the forefront of Kosovo's institutional engagement. Aggressive public disinformation campaigns, as well as concrete military and economic actions by Russia and other malign actors are taking hold in the Western Balkans. However, Kosovo has and never will submit to the destabilizing tendencies of authoritarian regimes that threaten to challenge our hard-earned way of life; indeed, we will continue to work hard to combat the risks these regimes pose.

The institutions and the people of Kosovo appreciate the support of allies and, in particular, the United States, for their efforts in building democratic institutions and consolidating democracy in our country. Democratic values have guided us on our state-building path, and this will remain so as we mark new and significant milestones going forward.

Although a small country, Kosovo knows too well the value of partnerships. As such, only during 2021, in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and in support of our U.S. and NATO allies Kosovo opened its doors to thousands of Afghan evacuees, it has joined the U.S. army in a peacekeeping mission, and has joined forces with regional and international allies to fight transnational organized crime.

As well as strengthening the rule of law, creating employment opportunities and bolstering our democracy, Kosovo remains firmly committed to a future which lies within the Euro-Atlantic structures and other international organizations. Achieving membership in Euro-Atlantic structures would be the ultimate confirmation of Kosovo's historic commitment towards embracing the shared values that have brought our societies closer to building sustainable and progressive democracies.

In this endeavor, we look forward to nurturing current strategic alliances and building new partnerships, focused on building strong democracies, which ultimately contribute and serve

as guarantors for sustainable peace around the world. Kosovo has, therefore, set out a list of commitments presented at the first edition of the Summit for Democracy, which will directly contribute towards meeting the aforementioned objectives.

The Republic of Kosovo stands ready to support the United States, and our allies around the world, to ensure our shared democratic values and principles prevail.

3. The Republic of Kosovo's commitments for the Summit for Democracy

3.1 Fighting Corruption

Fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law is the top priority of the new institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. This was a clear and direct request from the citizens during the February 2021 elections where they gave a historic mandate to an anti-corruption coalition. It is now also understood by our key strategic allies that this is a key priority for the President, the Prime Minister, Speaker of Parliament and other key institutional leaders. As ever, it is crucial that our work is coordinated in this field with our closest strategic partner, the United State of America, and we are pleased that this priority is in line with the international priorities set out by the Biden administration.

In order to achieve our commitments in this area, the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo will undertake and implement numerous activities, which include (but are not limited to) the following:

3.1.1 Implementation of the National Strategy on Rule of Law

The Strategy on Rule of Law is the output of a process entitled 'Functional Review of Rule of Law Sector'. The activities foreseen in this Strategy will contribute to reaching Kosovo institutions priorities, such as the prevention and fight against crime, as well as engagement in complying with human rights guaranteed under the Constitution and International Conventions, and achievement of gender equality. This Strategy is of the utmost importance in Kosovo's European integration process, as it contributes to the direct implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, signed between Kosovo and the European Union.

The Strategy has four main objectives: strengthening the judicial and prosecutorial system of the Republic of Kosovo; bolstering criminal justice; increasing access to justice; and, reinforcing the fight against corruption.

Concrete actions on the implementation of the Strategy, as outlined on the Strategy Action Plan, will be undertaken within the first half of 2022. Specifically, the following actions will be taken:

- Establishment of the inter-institutional coordinating body to ensure regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategy and action plan (Q1)
- Conducting actions for the implementation of the Strategy, according to the action plan (Q1 – Q4)
- Drafting legislation on the implementation of the Strategy, foreseen for year one and two, in the Action Plan (Q1 – Q4)
- Adoption of legislation on the implementation of the Strategy (Q1 – Q4)
- Draft report on the implementation of the Strategy (Q4)

3.1.2 Vetting Process

This process is closely linked with our goal of fighting corruption at the national level and is a key instrument for verifying the integrity, professionalism and wealth of key officials including the judges and prosecutors in Kosovo, as well as civil servants in senior positions, in the justice system. **The objective of this process is to instill integrity and professionalism at the heart of Kosovo's justice institutions and thereby increase civic trust in justice.**

Vetting will also be a mechanism to highlight judges, prosecutors and support staff who have integrity and professionalism. Crucially, this will not be a one-off process, and will instead be conducted continuously and in accordance with international standards and best practices.

The goals that the increased integrity of judges and prosecutors aim to achieve are as follows:

- A. Judicial and prosecutorial activity of the highest integrity is ensured through the continuous implementation of the legal and regulatory framework of judges and prosecutors that is in line with international standards.
- B. The integrity and regenerative capabilities of the justice system are maintained through regular integrity checks for judges, prosecutors and support staff.
- C. The administration of justice is credible because judges and prosecutors with superior leadership and managerial skills join the judiciary.
- D. Objective, fair and transparent procedures for the appointment of members of the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council (KPC) and Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) are translated into highly experienced and respected representatives among their judicial colleagues.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Establishing the working group and drafting of the constitutional and legislative amendments for the vetting process (Q1)
- Finalize vetting amendments and launch consultations with relevant stakeholders on the vetting process (Q2 & Q3)
- Adopt legislative changes on the vetting process (Q4)
- Initiate functionalization of vetting intuitions (Q4)

3.1.3 Adoption of the Magnitsky Act

The Draft Law on Targeted Sanctions for Foreign Human Rights Violators, known as the Magnitsky Act, applies to foreigners who are responsible for or assist in committing serious human rights violations and serious acts of corruption resulting in human rights abuse.

The adoption of this law aims to support democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the principles of international law, and will be completed in accordance with EU legislation and best international practices.

After its adoption, this law will authorize the Kosovo institutions to sanction those it sees as human rights offenders, freeze their assets, and ban them from entering the country.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Drafting of the legislation (Q1 & Q2)
- Public consultations with relevant stakeholders on the draft-law (Q3)
- Adoption of the draft law by the Government (Q3)
- Adoption of the law by the Parliament (Q4)

3.1.4 Seizing illicit wealth

The confiscation of unjustifiable wealth is one of the main methods of fighting corruption. For this reason, the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo will take a series of actions to prevent and combat this phenomenon. More specifically, during the next year, the following actions will be taken:

A. Adoption of the Law on the Establishment of the Bureau for Review of Unjustifiable Assets

The purpose of this law is the establishment of the state Bureau for the Confiscation of Unjustifiably Acquired Property.

The Bureau shall have the right to initiate court proceedings for the confiscation of property belonging to a person or persons after verifying and finding that the property is unjustifiable, providing evidence and information from all entities exercising public authority. The Bureau will work closely with the competent Courts in order to provide the necessary evidence.

Only the competent court decides on the confiscation of property. The Bureau, together with the Anti-Corruption Agency, will carry out related actions to identify and provide sufficient evidence to present to the court.

The drafting of this law will be done in full compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and international standards related to the rules on the property of the person against whom the verification is made.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Drafting of the legislation (Q1)
- Public consultations with relevant stakeholders on the draft-law (Q1 & Q2)
- Adoption of the law by the Parliament (Q3 - Q4)

B. Adoption and implementation of the Law on Declaration of Assets of Public Officials

Through the public declaration of assets, this law aims to increase transparency and trust in public officials through the monitoring of wealth and assets. The data recorded on the database will be easily transferable in the registers of other law enforcement institutions for the purposes of criminal or administrative investigation.

The new law will cover a broader range of public officials who will declare wealth and assets, including senior officials and public officials, as well as candidates for judges and prosecutors.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Drafting of the legislation (Q1)
- Public consultations with relevant stakeholders on the draft-law (Q1 & Q2)
- Adoption of the law by the Parliament (Q3)

C. Implementation of the Regulation on Whistleblowers

The regulation sets out the rules and procedures for the receipt and handling of whistleblowers' cases as well as the rights and responsibilities of the responsible officials.

The provisions of the Regulation facilitate and enable the effective reporting of information on violations found by advocates of the public interest, by establishing clear procedures for signaling any irregularities or violations that are made known during the exercise of the official duty.

Concrete measures on implementation of the Regulation will be set and adopted within the first quarter of the year.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Review the implementing mechanisms of the Regulation (Q1)
- Conduct regular checks on the implementation of the Regulation (Q1 – Q4)
- Draft a report on implementation of the Regulation (Q4)

3.2Defending Against Authoritarianism

The new institutions of the Republic of Kosovo are embracing domestic reform, but are also acutely aware of malign influences that use proxies in our region in an attempt to destabilize Kosovo and the entire Western Balkans. We are firmly committed to continuing and even strengthening our partnership with key allies, such as the United States, to ensure we combat this threat together.

Decades of U.S. investment in democracy are abundantly clear and evident in the region, in particular Kosovo. This work has positively impacted and improved the lives of citizens, so we must work collectively to ensure it is not undone.

In addition, progress on domestic reform will become futile if we cannot safeguard against these threats to our democratic principles and way of life, which is why it is paramount that we work to defend against authoritarian regimes in our region and around the world. In order to ensure the continuity of the integrity of our elections, reject these actors' economic

influence and their disinformation campaigns and fight all other kinds of malign influences, in this year, Kosovo will undertake measures that include (but are not limited to) the following:

3.2.1 Political Parties Sign Pledge on Election Integrity

In partnership with the Central Election Commission (CEC) and interested registered political parties, we will work to enhance election integrity by rejecting the influence of actors who seek to undermine democracy. By signing the Pledge on Election Integrity, political parties in the Republic of Kosovo will commit to not fabricate, use or spread falsified, fabricated, doxed, or stolen data or materials for disinformation or propaganda purposes. Also, the political parties that sign this pledge will commit to avoiding the dissemination of doctored media that impersonate other candidates, including deep-fake videos, as well as ensure that candidates, campaigns, and data about supporters are all safe from hacking operations.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on election integrity with input from CEC, political parties, relevant public institutions and civil society organizations based on the recommendations of the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity (Q2)
- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders and finalize the Pledge on Election Integrity (Q3)
- Invite political parties to sign the Pledge on Election Integrity (before the next electoral process)

3.2.2 Combat foreign governments interference in elections

Together with CEC, relevant public institutions and civil society organizations, the Republic of Kosovo aims to prohibit foreign governments' interference in elections, which try to sway national policymakers through foreign funding in electoral campaigns. While the current Kosovo law on general elections provides for the prohibition of foreign governments, corporations and individuals to make campaign contributions, improvements are required to ensure adequate implementation to protect Kosovo's democracy and the right of Kosovo

citizens to democratic self-governance. Institutional and legislative changes will help eliminate foreign political influence in Kosovo elections and dramatically increase transparency on financing for foreign governments, corporations and individuals.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on combating foreign interference in elections with input from CEC, public institutions and civil society organizations based on international best practices (Q2)
- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders on foreign interference in elections and required improvements to implementation mechanism and legislation (Q2)
- Prepare proposals for implementation mechanisms and legislative changes, if required (Q3)
- CEC adopts implementation mechanisms, if required (Q4)

3.2.3 Create a Platform on Information Integrity

In cooperation with the Association of Kosovo Journalists, the Independent Media Commission, relevant public institutions and civil society organizations, we will work to address disinformation's antidemocratic impact. The harmful effects of disinformation, particularly those sponsored and supported by autocratic regimes are immense. They are fueling hatred, violence, public health crises, discrimination, and democratic backsliding. The Republic of Kosovo is committed to address these new challenges through a partnership between media, public institutions and civil society organizations that will design adequate institutional, policy and legal responses.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on information integrity with input from media, public institutions and civil society organizations based on international best practices (Q2)

- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders on information integrity (Q2)
- Prepare the guiding documents for establishing the Platform on Information Integrity (Q3)
- Inaugurate the Platform on Information Integrity (Q4)

3.2.4 Improve the operating environment for civil society organizations and civic initiatives

The Republic of Kosovo public institutions will take affirmative action to maintain and expand the civic space for civil society organizations and civic initiatives. The Kosovo institutions will commit to inclusive policy processes that enable different voices, including those from marginalized groups, to be heard and taken into account when policies are set and implemented. Additionally, Kosovo institutions commit not to take any action that would narrow the civic space in Kosovo, either by adopting restrictive legislation or engaging in practices that hinder the ability of citizens to organize and engage.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on recommendations and standards to further improve inclusive policy-making processes with input from public institutions and civil society organizations based on international best practices (Q2)
- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders on inclusive policy-making processes (Q2)
- Draft recommendations and standards to further improve inclusive policy-making processes (Q3)
- Promote recommendations and standards to further improve inclusive policy-making processes (Q4)

3.2.5 Prohibiting public institutions and telecommunications companies from using untrusted vendors

In an age where technology infiltrated by malicious players poses some of the biggest security threats across the world, ensuring our public institutions are well-equipped to tackle this is paramount. But it is also crucial to understand and prevent the influence of malign actors in the technology used to provide the very security which we seek. That is why, the Republic of Kosovo is joining allies in prohibiting public institutions and telecommunications companies from using untrusted vendors. For this purpose, before introducing 5G technology, the Republic of Kosovo institutions in partnership with relevant stakeholders will undertake a careful review of the network security and the evaluation of 5G components and software providers.

The goal is to ensure the security of 5G wireless communications network from untrusted vendors through determining whether the network hardware and software suppliers are subject to control, without independent judicial review, by a foreign government.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on the review of the network security and the evaluation of 5G components and software providers based on international best practices (Q2)
- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders on network security and the evaluation of 5G components and software providers (Q3)
- Present the key findings of the review and prepare an implementation and transition plan on prohibiting public institutions and telecommunications companies from using untrusted vendors (Q4)
- Draft and approve by-laws related to prohibiting public institutions and telecommunications companies from using untrusted vendors (Year 2, Q1)

3.3 Advancing Human Rights – Diversity & Inclusivity

The Republic of Kosovo understands the importance of protecting – and crucially cherishes – human rights and civil liberties. At a time when women’s rights are being withdrawn or challenged around the world, the state of women’s rights represents a key indicators that showcases the progress and the level of protection of human rights in a certain country.

Standing up for women's rights and creating a more equal society through the necessary legislative and policy framework stands as a key commitment of Kosovo's current institutions in this mandate.

To deliver in this regard, the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo will undertake and implement the following activities:

3.3.1 Establish a Presidential Council for Democracy and Human Rights

Upholding the constitutional mandate of the President to represent the unity of the people and to guarantee the democratic functioning of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, **a Presidential Council will be established that will bring together public institutions and civil society organizations to drive and monitor the implementation of our commitments.** The establishment of the Presidential Council reaffirms Kosovo's long-term commitment to continuously improving our democracy and human rights.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Draft a concept paper on the Presidential Council for Democracy and Human Rights with input from public institutions and civil society organizations (Q1)
- Hold consultations with relevant stakeholders on establishment of the Presidential Council (Q1)
- Prepare the guiding documents for establishing the Presidential Council (Q1)
- Inaugurate the Presidential Council and its Secretariat (Q2)
- Hold regular meetings of the Presidential Council (Q3, Q4 and beyond)

3.3.2 Bolster the role of women in our society

Led by the President of the Republic of Kosovo, in joint cooperation with the Office of the Prime Minister, the respective ministries, members of parliament, civil society organizations and media, Kosovo will work towards creating equal opportunities for everyone, with women and girls from all backgrounds being at the center of our focus.

As women are the ones currently leading positive change in many areas in Kosovo, and are responsible for some of the greatest successes of our country, our institutions will work side-by-side with them to lead our country towards meeting the highest standard of gender parity. Action in this regard will be taken on two fronts:

1. *Initiating proceedings to harmonize all relevant laws with the provisions of the law on gender equality, to guarantee women's rightful place in public institutions and decision-making roles.*

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Conduct a legal review to identify all relevant laws that need to be harmonized with the law on gender equality, in order to ensure that important provisions to guarantee gender balanced practices are well aligned with the Law on Gender Equality (Q1)
 - Prepare the concept for the draft law to support the initiative (Q2)
 - Hold consultations with political parties, MPs, and relevant stakeholders to finalize a guiding document that will serve as the backbone of the initiated thematic legal reform (Q3)
 - Initiate necessary legal procedures to start the process (Q3-Q4)
2. *Adopting a bold national strategy against gender-based violence to implement the Istanbul Convention, to halt this epidemic through prevention and protection, and increase minimum sentences to reflect the severity of gender-based crimes.*

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Approval of the concept document of the National Strategy by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo (Q1 - Q2)

- Hold regular consultations within the Council for Democracy and Human Rights and with all relevant stakeholders to coordinate action towards meeting the objectives as set forth by this document (quarterly meetings)
- Hold biannual meetings with the Presidential Council for Democracy and Human Rights and other relevant stakeholders to evaluate the progress towards meeting the objectives of the national strategy (every 6 months)

3.3.3 Summit for Women in Peace and Security

It is well known that the women are underrepresented in the field of peace and security, however it is also noted that when women have been involved in these processes it has resulted in more sustainable peace and development.

The Republic of Kosovo is committed to ensuring an increased number of girls and women participate in key peace and security roles. With this aim, led by President Osmani, we will work with our international partners to host a global Summit to encourage more diversity in these key sectors that enable us increase equality, as well as be more successful in defending against authoritarianism.

Actions to be taken to implement this commitment include:

- Share the concept document about the Summit, draft agenda and objectives with potential partners (Q1)
- Send “Save the date” notice to partners, prospective speakers and attendees (Q1)
- Send invitations to partners, speakers and attendees (Q2)
- Share the Summit objectives with confirmed participants and organize online consultations with the aim of addressing received comments/inputs (Q2)
- Organize the first edition of the Summit (Q3)

4. Stakeholders and partnerships: Public Institutions, Independent Institutions, CSOs and Media

In order for the Republic of Kosovo's commitments to be truly successful and implementable, it is crucial to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and partners. Prior to the first edition of the Summit, the Office of the President met with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure:

- A well-rounded and inclusive contribution to the commitments made
- The relevant institutions and stakeholders were represented in our participation of the Summit
- Continuation of engagement with these stakeholders as we implement our commitments going forward, including through the Presidential Council for Democracy and Human Rights

Our engagement with stakeholders and partners thus far includes:

- The Parliament of Kosovo
- Office of the Prime Minister
- The Ministry of Justice
- The Ministry of Interior
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ombudsperson's Office
- Civil Society Organizations
- Media and journalist representative bodies
- International partners

5. Conclusion

The Republic of Kosovo has developed democratic institutions in record time and we are now working harder than ever to ensure the principles and values that the people of the country desire are not only maintained, but also strengthened. Fighting corruption and authoritarianism from abroad, and bolstering human rights, are our key priorities – which are fully aligned with our closest strategic ally, the United States of America. Kosovo is, in this way and many others, incredibly unique. Despite its size, it can make a significant contribution to peace, security and democracy around the world.

We are fully committed to the causes this Summit aims to promote, and we are confident that our bold, ambitious and concrete commitments (set out above) mark a significant step towards achieving our collective goal of strengthening democracy at home and abroad. Democracy is cherished by each and every citizen of the Republic of Kosovo because they all sacrificed immensely to achieve the freedoms we have today.

As we have learnt from history, democratic principles are not just some abstract political concepts. They have changed the lives of our citizens for the better and will continue to do so as we enhance them. As outlined in our official intervention: Democracy is never a finished or finite project. And on this final note, we want to reiterate that we stand ready to do everything that we can to continuously strengthen our young and vibrant democracy.